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## THE BRENDAN PROBLEM

It might well be supposed that the last word had long since been spoken upon St. Brendan, but the subject seems to have a perennial charm. Indeed, it would seem as if discussion about the life and the works of the saint would have no end. It is a subject that interests students of Romance, Celtic and early English philology, of legends, hagiology, voyages and comparative literature. For over a thousand years even the "general reader" has enjoyed the tale of daring adventure and boundless faith of the intrepid sailor-saint and the flavor of romance and picturesque details with which it has been narrated. Is it any wonder, then, if *Brendaniana* are almost without number and are constantly being added to? In spite of all that has been written on the subject, however, many points are still unsettled, and, concerning some of them, the more that is written the more, it would seem, the subject becomes confused and embroiled. Many of the documents are obscure and all of them must be lighted up by new interpretation. The object of the present article and of the bibliography which is appended to it is merely to give a general survey of the results already achieved, and to point out some of the problems which still await solution, in the hope that some student may be induced to do what the distinguished Franciscan, Father John Colgan, had planned to do, in the seventeenth century, namely, to examine the legend afresh, and to bring together in one comprehensive volume all the sources and all the legends and associated myths bearing upon St. Brendan in all the vernaculars of Europe.

Among the saints, not only of Ireland but of the entire Church, St. Brendan occupies a place apart, and there is perhaps no saint in whose life fact and fable have been more inextricably inter-

woven. He shone as a brilliant star in the firmament of Ireland's sanctity in the sixth century, and, because of his holy life and the important activity which he exercised, he won for himself a foremost place in the history of the Irish Church. In the course of time pious legends grew around his name, and, above all, an ocean voyage was ascribed to him, as a result of which his legend became one of the most remarkable and widely spread in the Middle Ages, and, owing to this voyage, its hero became the most celebrated man of his day.

There are some who have gone so far as to deny that St. Brendan ever existed, but the majority of his biographers have regarded him as an historical personage. As nearly as can be determined, he was born in or about the year 484—though some of the old Irish annals deviate considerably from this date—and, consequently, he was a contemporary of some of the other great saints of Ireland.<sup>1</sup> His pedigree is variously given in several manuscripts, though in the main the different accounts agree. The version in the Book of Leinster,<sup>2</sup> for example, is as follows: "Brendan, the Apostle, son of Findlug, son of Elchu, son of Alta, son of Ogaman, son of Fidchuire, son of Delmna, son of Enna, son of Fualascach, son of Astoman, son of Mogaed, who is called Ciar, son of Fergus, son of Ros."

Thus his father's name was Findlug; his mother was called Cara,<sup>3</sup> and he had a brother, Domanigin,<sup>4</sup> who became Bishop of Tuaim Muscraige. But, next to himself, the best known member of the family was his sister, Brig, who is commemorated on the 7th of January: "Quam intime diligebat, quia, etsi natura sanguinis reddebat eam caram, gratie tum illustracio faciebat cariorem"—"whom he loved dearly because, even though the connection of blood made her dear to him, the brightness of her grace rendered her even dearer."<sup>5</sup>

Not only was Brendan descended from the kings of Ireland, but he is even, in some texts, called "King of Ciarraige (Kerry) Luachra." In a French translation of the life of St. Fursey<sup>6</sup> it

<sup>1</sup> On Brendan's birth, see *Acta Sanctorum, Maii III*, 1738, 600, col. 1.

<sup>2</sup> fo. 349d.

<sup>3</sup> Brigitta, or Brigida, according to others.

<sup>4</sup> And two other brothers, according to others.

<sup>5</sup> PLUMMER, *Vitae SS. Hiberniae*, i, 100.

<sup>6</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, Jan. 44; *Romania*, xvii, 1888, p. 384.

is stated that King Findlug reigned in Munster and that Brendan was one of the other kings of Ireland. There can be no doubt that Brendan was a Kerryman, though Rodulfus Glaber,<sup>7</sup> who wrote about the year 1048, would make out "Bendanus," as he calls him, to have been an East Anglian, "*orientalium videlicet Anglorum*," probably through confusion with Brendan's nephew, Fursey, who, as is well known, was connected with East Anglia. The Annals of Boyle state that our saint was born in Connaught, and in an Anglo-Norman poem on St. Moduenna he is said to have been "*. . . un clerc vaillant esteit en Escose vivant*."<sup>8</sup> Thomas Dempster also, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Scotorum*, quotes authors to prove that Brendan was a Scotchman. In a life in Italian prose (*Codex Magliabechiano*, 14th century), we read: "San Brandano, figliuolo di Silocchia che fu di Scotia oltr'alle parti di Spagna," where Scotia, as usual in those days, means Ireland. Washington Irving, too, misled by this, informs us that St. Brendan was a Scotch monk. Nor can there be any doubt that the cradle of the saint was at Alltraighe Caille, on the western coast of Ireland, not far from Tralee. As far back as the time of St. Patrick his coming was foretold. In the Tripartite Life of that Saint<sup>9</sup> it is said that the apostle did not visit West Munster, but that, instead, he prophesied that, 120 years after his death, St. Brendan would be born into the eternal life. His future greatness was also foretold by Bec Mac Dé, the celebrated prophet. The following legend is recorded in several manuscripts:<sup>10</sup> "The mother of Brendan had a vision, that an ingot of gold fell into her bosom, and that her breasts were aflame (*alias*, shining like snow). Findlug related that vision to his soul-friend (as the Irish called a father confessor), Bishop Erc, who interpreted the dream to mean that a marvelous child would be born of the woman who beheld that vision. The Bishop himself had a dream of a glow of fire, and it was full of angels from heaven to the ground. On the morrow he went to Findlug's house and took the boy into his arms, and bestowed his

<sup>7</sup> *Collect. des mém. relatifs à l'hist. de France*, vi, p. 204; *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, v, 137 note.

<sup>8</sup> *Romanische Studien*, i, p. 558.

<sup>9</sup> P. 208; *Revue Celtique*, x, 142-143.

<sup>10</sup> *Book of Leinster*, 371. *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*.



protection upon him. That was the night whereon Bec Mac Dé, the prophet, chanced to be in the house of the king of Ciarraige Luachra, and the king asked him, 'What seest thou for us tonight, O Bec?' 'I see that thy king is born between thee in the west and the sea.' 'Truly,' saith the king, 'we know of no free race between us and the sea that would have a right to reign over us.' Bec replied, 'The son that is born to Findlug this night will be thy king forever.'"<sup>11</sup>

On the night of Brendan's birth strange things happened in the realm of Findlug, his father. A homely passage in the *Lismore Life* is worth translating: "A certain wealthy man dwelt in a residence far from Findlug's house; Airde, son of Fidach, was his name. In that night of Brendan's birth thirty cows brought forth thirty calves at Airde son of Fidach's. Thereafter, early on the morrow, Airde arose and kept asking for the house in which the little child had been born, and he found Findlug's house and the babe therein, and he knelt devoutly in his presence and offered him the thirty cows with their thirty calves, and that was the first alms that Brendan received."

It will not be necessary, for our purpose, to tell in full the story of the upbringing and growth in holiness of the young Brendan, however full of interest and edifying that might be. One of the Latin lives of the saint begins in the following poetic manner: "There was a man of venerable life, Brendan by name, who, like the glowing dawn, dispelled the darkness of sin from the hearts of many, and afforded an infallible guidance to the port of salvation for those who were wandering in the sea of vice."<sup>12</sup> According to some of our sources, Brendan was baptized at what is now called Tubber na molt, "the wedders' well," in the townland of Tubrid, not far from Ardferit. According to the life of St. Kieran,<sup>13</sup> Mobhi was the first name given to the boy by his parents,

fair his face;  
A youth hostful, seeking, slender.  
He was a help to the men of Erin.

Thereafter he was called Braon-find, "White-shower," with

<sup>11</sup> Féire Oeng., May 16; Book of Leinster, 391, col. 1.

<sup>12</sup> PLUMMER, *Vitae SS. Hiberniae*, i, 98.

<sup>13</sup> Beatha Chfáráin Saighre, p. 63.

reference, the glossator opines, either to the waters of baptism, or to his fair body, or to the rain which flooded the tract of land near his birthplace; and it is by this name, modernized as Brendan, the generally accepted form, that he has been known to history and fable. The indeclinable Irish word Brenaínd is probably the oldest form of the name and is composed of *brén*, "fetidus," and *find*, "capillus," or it may be borrowed from the Old Welsh *brenhin*, "a king," contracted from *bre-en-hin*.<sup>14</sup> The name is found in Irish documents in a variety of spellings, such as Brenann, Brenand, Brenund, Brenunn, Brenain, Brendain, Brenaínd. These were probably originally only forms of a pet name, Bréndán, which in the course of time became shortened to Bréndan, Brénden, until finally it came to be pronounced as it is today, Bren'n, unless when the pronunciation is made to conform to the spelling. From Brendan come the forms found in Latin documents, of which, in the oldest period, Brendinus and Brendenus are commoner than the more frequently occurring Brendanus. In the Romance and Teutonic languages the name has taken on a great variety of forms, such as, among others, Brandanies, Brandans, Brenoin, Brandan, Brandain, Brandano, Blandin, Borodon, Morodon. The medieval attempts to explain the word from *broen-* (or *braon-*) *find*, as above, or from *broen-dian*, "swift rain," are all erroneous, as is also its apparent connection with *bran*, "a raven."<sup>15</sup> In an old Irish poem<sup>16</sup> our saint is invoked as "Brenuinn breo betha buadhaig," "Brendan, flame of a victorious world," where we perceive another conjecture as to the meaning of the word. In the Old French *Roman de Bouduin de Sebourc*, Brendan is said to have got his name from the *brandons*, or firebrands, which the devils saw him cast at them when he came near to hell:

Et fu si près d'enfer, che est chertain et clair,  
Que de brandons le virent li deable geter,  
Et pour che le poet-on saint Brandon appeler.

He is often called "Brendan of Clúain Ferta," from the name of the cloister which he founded in County Galway, and "Bren-

<sup>14</sup> KUNO MEYER, *Miscellanea Hibernica*, University of Illinois Studies, ii, Nov. 16, 1916, p. 10, note 2; *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum u. d. Litt.*, Bd. xxxiii.

<sup>15</sup> *Revue Celtique*, xxvii, 169.

<sup>16</sup> *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, pp. 103-104.

denus Mocu Alti," from the name of his great-grandfather, Alta. In some versions, the latter name is debased to Mac Cualte (Cualti) and Mac Uilte.<sup>17</sup>

Nearly a score of saints named Brendan are mentioned in the Irish calendars,<sup>18</sup> one of whom, otherwise unknown, according to the *Vita Sanctae Moduennae*, was "unus de poetis Scotorum praeclarissimus nomine Brendem, vir ab infantia oculis orbus sed in arte poetica inter omnes praecipuus." But the Brendan with whom the subject of this sketch is most often both confused and associated is Brendan of Birr, who was some years older than his namesake and who got his name from Birr (Biorra), a place in King's County. The life of St. Ruadanus, for example, speaks of these two Brendans, "Brandanus filius Finloga, et Brandanus Birra." In fact, the author of the Martyrology of Donegal admits the possibility of confusing the several Brendans. The distinguished Celticist, Zimmer, even went so far as to maintain that the whole of the legend of Brendan had been developed out of a misunderstanding of a passage in the Martyrology of Tallacht, which belongs to the end of the ninth century and in which, under date of XI Kal. Apr.,<sup>19</sup> is mentioned the "egressio familie Brendini," and of a passage in the Voyage of Maelduin, where our hero and his crew are represented as having landed on a large island, where they espied an ancient man who told them that he was the sole survivor of the fifteen men who composed the crew of Brendan of Birr, and he even showed the newcomers the book-satchel which had belonged to his master.<sup>20</sup> In other words, Zimmer held that the glory that belonged to Brendan of Birr, because of some obscure sea voyage, was afterwards attributed to Brendan of Clonfert.

While still an infant, Brendan was sent to be reared by his foster mother, St. Ita, a pious woman of royal birth to whom it was customary to entrust promising boys for training, with a view to their subsequent preparation for Holy Orders. She thus became the nurse of many Irish saints. At her monastery, Killeedy (Ceall Ita, "Ita's Church"), in County Limerick,

<sup>17</sup> *Codex Salm.*, p. 306.

<sup>18</sup> *Book of Leinster*, p. 366.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 357, col. 4, l. 31.

<sup>20</sup> *Revue Celtique*, X, 72.

Brendan lived five years. He then spent another five years reading the psalms with Bishop Erc, who died in 512. He was afterwards educated, some say, at Clonard, under St. Finnian, whose disciple he became and from whom he must have received an excellent schooling. He is also said to have gone to school to Bishop Iarlaithe (Jarlath, of Tuam), who must have been a very old man at that time, and there is an ancient Irish poem in ten quatrains,<sup>21</sup> the first five of which were recited by Brendan and the remainder by the Bishop, as those two holy men saw a train of angels rising from a holy graveyard. It begins, "Ard reileac na n-angel n-án,"

Lofty graveyard of splendid angels  
I see before my eyes;  
Cold hell shall not be shown  
To those who are interred in its clay.

Some of the old authorities<sup>22</sup> attribute the following works, among others, to Brendan: *Confessio Christiana*, Lib. I, *Charta coelestis haereditatis*, Lib. I, *Revelationes de futuris temporibus*, Lib. I, *Epistulae quaedam*, and *De fortunatis Insulis*, none of which have come down to us, if indeed they ever existed. Other old prayers and poems in Irish and Latin, moral maxims, a prophecy and a vision, he is said to have written, and also a monastic Rule, according to which he regulated his life. This Rule, it was said, because of its excellence, was dictated by an angel and remains to this day among the successors of St. Benedict! Medieval historians, indeed, designate Brendan as a Benedictine, which is rather to be expected.<sup>23</sup> The so-called Lorica, or "Breast-Plate," of St. Brendan is preserved in at least a dozen manuscripts.<sup>24</sup> A rubric in some of them informs us that it was when imperiled on the sea that Brendan composed this prayer at the dictation of St. Michael:

Beatus Brendanus monachus, quaerens insulam repromissionis per septem annos continuos orationem istam de verbo Dei per Michaellem

<sup>21</sup> *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, pp. 104-105; O'DONOGHUE, *Brendaniana*, pp. 21-23.

<sup>22</sup> J. A. FABRICII, *Bibl. Lat. mediae et inf. aetat.*; HARRIS-WARE, ii, 16; TANNER, *Bibl. Britan. Hibern.*

<sup>23</sup> USSHER, *Works*, VI, 484; JOHANN. TRITHEMIUS, *De Viris Illust. Ord. S. Benedicti*, xxxi.

<sup>24</sup> L. GOUGAUD, *Bull. d'anc. litt. et d'arch. chrét.*, 1911, 266-267; PALERMO, *I Manoscritti Palatini di Firenze*, I, 234; C. WAHLUND, *Brendans Meerfahrt*, xvi-xvii.

archangelum fecit quando transfretavit septem maria. Domine libera nos  
sicut liberasti Ionam de potestate ceti magni. Domine libera servos tuos  
sicut liberasti David de manu Golie gigantis.

Because of his holiness and zeal, large numbers of students and pilgrims came to listen to Brendan and many of them remained with him that they might be under his spiritual guidance. In the life of St. Senan, it is told how a ship touched at Inishcarra, having on board fifty men, Romans by birth or subject to the laws of Rome. These religious had heard of the reputation which Ireland enjoyed for learning and sanctity, and they desired to perfect themselves in scriptural knowledge and to lead lives of stricter observance. They were divided into five bands of ten persons each, and had agreed among themselves that each group should in turn assume the control of the vessel. Each band was destined to place itself under the direction of one of the great masters whose fame they had previously heard of, one of whom was St. Brendan. He became the founder of many monasteries, "And there he ladde a full straye and holy lyfe in grete penaunce and abstynence and he governed his monkes ful vertuously."<sup>25</sup> St. Gildas, of Wales, whom he visited, called him "Pater Laboriosus."<sup>26</sup> He founded a monastery called Enach-duin, not far from the shore, in Lough Corrib, County Galway, whither he had retired for rest after his voyage or voyages in search of the Land of Promise. But his greatest establishments were at Ardfert, County Kerry, and the school of Clonfert, which he founded about the year 557 and where, including probably its scattered branches, he is said to have ruled over 3,000 students. Hence ever afterwards Clonfert has been called Clúain-ferta-Brenainn, in the native annals. In the Martyrology, the founder and legislator of the monastery is called "Brenaind colín a eltae," "Brendan with the multitude of his flocks," the reference being, it is likely, to the number of his followers. In the Annals of Tigernach,<sup>27</sup> under the year 557, is a quatrain in Old Irish which commemorates the foundation of the church of Clonfert. It begins:

O gabais mac úi hEllta  
Brenaind . . . ,

<sup>25</sup> THOMAS WRIGHT, *Sanct Brandan*, p. 35.

<sup>26</sup> *Irish Eccl. Record*, 1912, 173-174.

<sup>27</sup> *Chron. Scotorum*, 559; *Revue Celtique*, xvii, 142.

"Since the great-grandson of Alta, Brendan, with all his perfections, took it [Clonfert], if it be not the better for it, it is not the worse, from that time to this." Brendan was an abbot, not a bishop, though in some of the versions he is given the title of bishop.

Brendan belonged to the second of the three Orders into which the early Irish historians arranged their native saints; he was also one of the twelve apostles of Ireland and was closely associated with many of the other holy men and women of his time. Some Irish manuscripts<sup>28</sup> contain a parallelism of Roman and Irish saints, in which Patricius is equated with Petrus Apostolus, "Brendinus senior" (Brendan of Birr) is placed parallel with Bartolom. Apost., and "Brennain Cluana Ferta" is compared, in manners and life, to Thomas Apostolus. Brendan was also one of the company of saints who fasted and prayed so that the Ulster champion Fergus might rise from his grave and relate to them, and thus save from perdition, the great tale of "The Cualnge Cattle-Raid." We learn from a poem describing the Assembly of Druimceat, where the Treaty was passed by which Ireland granted self-determination to her colony in Alba, that among the fifty saints who accompanied Columcille were "the two Brendans."<sup>29</sup> On another occasion, having heard that the saints of Ireland were fasting upon King Diarmait before Tara, Brendan who was at that time in exploration of the sea also proceeded thither. They stayed for a year before Tara, fasting every other night, while the king fasted within the city. But the King, hearing of his coming, was terrified. Then Brendan, fresh from his triumphs on the ocean, summoned fifty seals which he transformed into horses for a year and a season. At the expiration of that period, they became seals again, and brought their riders with them into the sea.<sup>30</sup> There was the closest intimacy between St. Brendan and St. Columcille, who was several years his junior.<sup>31</sup> To Brendan, Columcille is said

<sup>28</sup> E. g., *Book of Leinster*, 370, a.

<sup>29</sup> O'KELLEHER and SCHOEPPERLE, *Life of Columcille*, p. 340.

<sup>30</sup> DOUGLAS HYDE, *Literary History of Ireland*, p. 230; STANDISH H. O'GRADY, *Silva Gadelica*, i 67, ii 71.

<sup>31</sup> NICHOLAS O'KEARNEY, *The Prophecies of SS. Columbkille, etc.*, p. 21; *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philol.*, vii, 302.

to have addressed his famous prophecy, and it is in recognition of the religious establishments which our saint is said to have founded years before Columcille set foot on the Scottish coast that Brendan is honored to this day as the Apostle of the Orkneys and the Isles. In Columcille's celebrated poem in praise of Erin, beginning "Gaeth a clerigh, bind a heóin," "Wise her (Ireland's) clerics, sweet her birds," the last quatrain runs:

In the west is sweet voiced Brendan,  
And Colum, the son of Crimthann;  
In the west is fair Baithín,  
And in the west Adamnan shall be.<sup>32</sup>

We also have a dialogue ascribed to these two great saints: "Columcille sang it as he left for Alba, asking the support of Brendan after him":<sup>33</sup>

- I Tell me, Brendan, this: How shall we make compact?  
How will it avail me here, thy friendship, thy nearness?
- . . . . .
- VI Long meseems thy going east, O pious Columcille.  
Dearest to me art thou of all that's born, O best cleric that ever came!
- VII Say not so, for 'tis not true; better a hundred times art thou.  
For soul hath not entered body over whom the demon hath not power,  
Save thee alone, O Brendan!

In a fragment of a life of Columcille, in the *Codex Salmanticensis*,<sup>34</sup> is a touching story of Brendan's friendship for Columcille. Once upon a time the latter was condemned by the Synod for having committed a slight infraction of the Rule, in succoring some poor men with food which he had taken from a miserly master. As he approached the assembly-place where the elders were in session, St. Brendan, "qui erat quasi columpna hujus consilii," came to meet Columcille and kissed him, though all the others were hostile, and, "per salubria consilia," advised him to come before the synod and excuse himself, which Columcille did. The elders chided Brendan for having kissed Columcille before they had been reconciled to him, but Brendan answered that they would not have blamed him if they had seen

<sup>32</sup> O'KELLEHER and SCHOEPPERLE, *Life of Columcille*, p. 282.

<sup>33</sup> *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, vii, 302.

<sup>34</sup> Pp. 221-224.

what he had seen, even the fiery column from heaven that preceded Columcille, and angels of God flying around him in the field. Then calling Columcille to one side, he prophesied his exile to a foreign land. Both Adamnan and Cuimine the Fair relate that on one occasion Brendan accompanied Comgall of Bangor, Cainnech (Kenneth) of Aghaboe, and Cormac ua Liathain of Durrow to visit Columcille, who was then staying in Imba (supposed to be Oronsay, Scotland), and Columcille at their request celebrated Mass before them on the Sunday. Brendan afterwards told his companions that during part of the ceremony Columcille had seemed to him to be standing at the bottom of a pillar of fire streaming upward.<sup>35</sup> Brendan was also associated with Saints Bairre and Cainnech in other adventures. In the life of St. Ciaran of Clonmacnois<sup>36</sup> it is stated that the two Saints Ciaran, he of Clonmacnois and he of Saigir, and the two Saints Brendan, the one of Clonfert and the other of Birr, and Columcille and many others attended the school conducted by the master, Finnian.<sup>37</sup> In the Latin life of Ciaran of Saigir, we read how the "duo sancti Kyarani et duo sancti Brendani societatem et fraternitatem inter ipsos et inter habitatores locorum suorum semper firmaverunt," "the two Saints Ciaran and the two Saints Brendan established intercourse and fraternity between themselves and between the inmates of their foundations." In the Irish life of the same saint,<sup>38</sup> it is said that on one occasion the two Brendans happened to be visiting Ciaran, when the other Ciaran, of Clonmacnois, arrived. Again, Brendan of Birr was once in danger of drowning in the River Brosna, near Birr, because of a sudden burst of the sea, when Brendan of Clonfert pulled him out of the water and saved him from being drowned.<sup>39</sup> The Calendar of Oengus, under date of May 16, contains a quatrain in Irish, of which the following is a translation:

The unity of Cainnech and Bairre,  
And of Brendan, both one and other,  
Whoever outrages any one of them,  
The miracles of the three will avenge him.

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<sup>35</sup> ADAMNAN, *Columba*, iii, 17.

<sup>36</sup> PLUMMER, *Vitae SS. Hib.*, i, 205.

<sup>37</sup> PLUMMER, *ibid.*, i, 230.

<sup>38</sup> MULCAHY, p. 63.

<sup>39</sup> Féilire Oengusso.



Very early the legends which grew around the name of St. Brendan begin to make their appearance. One of the most poetic is the story of Brendan's hermitage, or of St. Brendan, the Young Harper and the bird-like Angel, which is found in several manuscripts.<sup>40</sup> One Easter-day, seven years before his death, Brendan had said Mass, preached and made offering. It was mid-day and the monks went to their refectory; a student was there with his harp and played music for them. And he expressed the desire to play some strains for Brendan, but the monks said that Brendan would not let him, "for," said they, "it is now seven years since Brendan smiled or heard a melody of the music of the world." Nevertheless the student tunes his harp and goes to Brendan. "Open," saith the student. "Who is there?" saith Brendan. "A student come to play the harp for thee." "Play outside," saith Brendan. But the student asked to be permitted to play in the church for a while. Brendan opened the door and the student held the harp behind his back. When Brendan saw the harp he put into his ears two wax balls which lay on his book with a thread between them. At the entreaty of the student, Brendan took the wax out of his ears. The student played and Brendan gave him his blessing, and put the wax balls into his ears. "Why wilt thou not listen to the music? Is it because it seems to thee bad?" "Not for that," Brendan replied; and he told how once, just seven years before, he was in the church and a great longing seized him for the Lord, and trembling and fear possessed him. And as he was there a bird as bright as the sun came in by the window and sat upon the altar. It was Michael, the Angel, in the form of a bird, come to make harmony for him from the Lord. And for hours Brendan listened, and ever afterwards no melody of the world's music seemed sweeter to him. For that reason he had the balls of wax to put into his ears whenever he heard a melody. "Take my blessing," said Brendan to the student, "and thou shalt have heaven's music for thy playing." The same story is told in the life of St. Ciaran of Saigir, but according to this version the event took place fourteen years before the death of St. Brendan, and the bird, which was Michael, came in at the open window of the church

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<sup>40</sup> *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, p. xiii-xv; RAWLINSON, B. 512; Martyrology of Donegal.

at Clonfert and perched on the altar. It placed its bill behind the feathers of its wing and sweeter than the music of the world was the music which it made. For four and twenty hours Brendan was listening to it, and from that hour until his death he would not lend ear to any worldly music whatever, except one Easter-day when he permitted a clerical student to play his harp for him.

A tale which explains the origin of the family name Dobarchu and, at the same time, illustrates a common trait in the lives of Celtic saints, namely, their friendliness with animals, is found in several manuscripts.<sup>41</sup> St. Brendan had a neighbor called Dobarchu, "the Otter," who owned a meadow of grass that abutted on Loch Lir. Now it happened that Brendan's cattle trespassed on the meadow and Dobarchu killed them. Then said Brendan, "If it please God, may He make an otter of him!" Sometime thereafter Dobarchu with his wife and son came by the meadow and he saw a trout which he angled for and caught. He built a fire of ferns, broiled his trout and ate it. He then proceeded to the loch to take a drink of water, but, as a result of Brendan's curse, he fell in and was turned to an otter. When his son and wife came to the loch, the son began to fish for a trout, but an otter appeared and forbade him. From that time on, his descendents, the Uí Dobarchon, of Thomond, do not touch salmon. In a note in the Calendar of Oengus, under April 7, there is reference to a place which, the glossator suggests, got its name "from the flying of the 'prechain' (the pet raven or scall crow) that Brendan once sent out before him from the north from Clúain Ferta Brenainn." In the same calendar, under January 2, is a curious story of the way in which Brendan tested the virtue and superhuman asceticism of a comrade named Scothíne, and discovered, to his surprise, that Scothíne was better than he was. In the life of St. Ciaran of Saigir is a story which illustrates Brendan's abstemiousness. Ciaran once pretended to be ill in order to compel St. Brendan to accept a cow as a gift.<sup>42</sup> On another occasion, while sailing on the River Berba, Brendan lost a beaker filled with wine, and, in a song in Irish, he called upon St. Moduenna and promised her the beaker if

<sup>41</sup> *Book of Lismore*; Mélusine, iv, 298-299.

<sup>42</sup> CAPGRAVE, *Nova Legenda Ang.*, ed. Horstmann.

she sent it to him. At once the beaker appeared upon the surface of the water and Brendan afterwards sent it to Moduenna.<sup>43</sup> According to the Anglo-Norman verse version of her life, however, it was not on the River Berba that Brendan was sailing, but on the ocean.<sup>44</sup> A somewhat similar story is told in the life of St. Cainnech of Aghaboe, how once St. Brendan's artisan was making a golden chalice, and he ran short of gold. Brendan had recourse to St. Cainnech ("who frequently goes to Britain") who miraculously, though most indelicately, provided the gold.<sup>45</sup> It is not certain if our Brendan is meant by the "Sanctus Brendanus Senior" who, in a single day, wrought seven remarkable miracles in the name of Christ, and who, on a hill called Munchile, at a place where are the "Cruces Brendani," prophesied the virtues of St. Baire of Cork.

Several curious stories are told of the relations of our saint and his pupil, St. Finan, afterwards abbot of Cenn Etigh, whose birth Brendan had prophesied to his parents, even that their son would be great in the sight of God.<sup>46</sup> Then did the boy come and study Brendan's Rule with the master. One day Finan brought from the forest wood to make a staff, without having previously received the permission of the abbot. When Brendan saw it, he threw it into the fire. But the fire not only did not consume the staff, but it shaped it just as Finan wanted it. Another day, his bread fell into the fire, and Brendan said, "Finan, the fire is burning your bread." But Finan was busy at the time and it was only after some delay that he put his hand into the middle of the fire, and the fire neither burned his hand nor the bread.<sup>47</sup> Brendan is also mentioned in connection with the celebrated St. Enda, Abbot of the Aran Isles, which Giraldus Cambrensis describes as "insula quaedam in occidentali Conactiae salo posita, cui nomen Aren; a S. Brendano, ut aiunt, consecrata."<sup>48</sup> Accompanied by fourteen brothers, Brendan sailed westward to St. Enda's island, where he spent three days and three nights, and then, with the blessing of Enda and of Enda's

<sup>43</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, 6 Jun. ii, 308.

<sup>44</sup> BOEHMER, *Romanische Studien*, i, 558.

<sup>45</sup> PLUMMER, *Vitae SS. Hib.*, i, 168; *Codex Salam.*

<sup>46</sup> *Codex Salam.*, 306-307.

<sup>47</sup> PLUMMER, *l. c.*, ii, 87-88.

<sup>48</sup> *Topog. Hib.*, *Dist.* 2.

monks, he returned to the mainland to visit his own people.<sup>49</sup> But the most celebrated of Brendan's disciples was his grand-nephew, St. Fursey, who, like the master, became the hero of some remarkable and more or less mythical adventures. Brendan had raised a hospice on the island of Inchiquin, "the Island of the O'Quin," in Lough Corrib, for the reception of wayfarers and pilgrims, and it was while his nephew Fintan, son of the king of Munster, and his wife Gelges were visiting him on the island that Fursey was born. Brendan baptized the child and educated him in the monastery under his direction. A stone fort in the townland of Ard Fintan is said to be still shown as the guest chamber in which Fintan and Gelges lived when they visited St. Brendan on Lough Corrib.<sup>50</sup>

Brendan's name is mentioned in connection with the ancient Irish hymn, "Brigit bé bithmaith," "Brigit ever-good woman," of which he is said to have been the author, though the hymn is most commonly ascribed to St. Ultan.<sup>51</sup> The adventure referred to therein is also narrated in a note in the Franciscan (Dublin) copy of St. Broccán's hymn beginning "Ní car Brigit," "Brigit loved not,"<sup>52</sup> and a fragment of it is found also in the Rennes manuscript, 598 anc. 138 irlandais, f<sup>o</sup> 74, col. b, l. 5.<sup>53</sup> Since the Rennes fragment has not been printed before, the Irish text is given here as well as the translation, though it differs mainly only in spelling from the hitherto published versions. The *italics* represent the filling up of contractions:

Seacht mbliadna bói Brenainn for muir ic iarrair tíre tarrngere 7 robói beist ina lenmhain frisin résin i ndiaidh in curoich. Fecht ann táinic péist oile chuici día mharbad coro ataigh in ní Brenainn 7 fría naepu Eirenn risin péist aile 7 ní rosanacht nóco roataigh inní Brigit; co nérbairt Brenainn na biadh ní badh siriu for muir nóco fesad cidh ara ndernad ar Brigit an firtsá seach cách. Taineic iarum Brenainn do shaigid Brighti 7 ro foillsiged do Brigit in ní sin. Is ann sin dobói Brigit ac ingaire cháorech i Cuirriuch Liphe co táinic i comdháil Brenainn co Domnach mór fría Chillardara aníar coro bennachsát inuicem. Ec lec Brénnainn lotar iarum isin tech. Fócértt Brigit a cochull fliuch for an gai ngreine 7 lenaidh fair.

<sup>49</sup> USSHER, *Works*, vi, 533.

<sup>50</sup> *Irish Eccles. Record*, 1912, pp. 173-174.

<sup>51</sup> *Lismore Lives*, pp. 332-334, 353; *Liber Hymnorum*, i, 108-109, ii, 98; *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, ii, 335.

<sup>52</sup> *Liber Hymnorum*, i, 118, ii, 196.

<sup>53</sup> *Revue Celtique*, xv, 88.

*Dixit Brenainn frítha ghilla a cochull do cur fair cotorcair do ngai fo díi. Focertt Brenainn fein in tres fecht la feirg 7 stetted fair. Rofhiarfaig Brigit dia coic cia métt do bíudh ro bóí ocu tunc. Dixit non est hoen-ocht-madh grain eórna. Rucad don mhuilenn Rátha Cáthair fri Cilldara aníar fo trí 7 for femdhes a bleith and.*

Seven<sup>54</sup> years was Brendan at sea seeking the Land of Promise, and at that time a monster was following him in the wake of the boat. Once another monster came up to it to slay it, and it besought Brendan and all the other saints of Ireland against the other monster, but that protected it not until it besought Brigit. So that Brendan declared that he would not remain any longer at sea until he learned why this miracle was wrought for Brigit and not for others. Then did Brendan set out on a journey to Brigit, and that was revealed to her. At that time she was herding sheep in the Currach of the Liffey, and she went to meet Brendan to Domnach Mór to the west of Kildare, and each of them greeted the other.

At "Brendan's Stone" they then went into the house. Brigit flung her wet cloak on the sunbeam but it fell off it twice; the third time Brendan himself flung it angrily, and it remained on it.

Brigit inquired of her cook how much food she had. She replied that she had only one-eighth of barley grain. That was taken to the mill at Rath Cathair west of Kildare thrice,<sup>55</sup> and they refused to grind it there.

On two occasions at least, in after life, Brendan is represented as holding holy converse with his old nurse, St. Ita.<sup>56</sup> When her end approached, the good woman, grieving for the absence of Brendan, exclaimed: "If I could but see with my eyes the holy Brendan, my beloved foster child, and hear with my ears his voice, and receive from his hands the Body of my Lord Jesus Christ this very night of the nativity of my Lord!" And her prayer was answered.<sup>57</sup>

One of Brendan's many strange undertakings was his visit to hell, to bring back the soul of his mother.<sup>58</sup> There is even a purgatory named after him. Belief in its existence is expressed, for example, in the following tetrastich by Alexander Necham:

Asserit esse Locum solennis Fama dicatum  
Brendano, quo lux lucida saepe micat  
Purgandas animas, datur hic transire per ignes,  
Ut dignae facie iudicis esse queant,

<sup>54</sup> "Four" is the reading of the other MSS.; cf. ZIMMER, *Zeit. für deutsches Alt. u. d. Litt.*, xxxiii, 131, 301.

<sup>55</sup> "Twice," in the other MSS.

<sup>56</sup> PLUMMER, *l. c.*, ii, 121.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 145.

<sup>58</sup> *Revue Celtique*, xxxi, 309-311.

which has been quaintly Englished as follows:

To Brandan sacred, as Tradition says,  
There stands a Place, where trembling Lightning plays;  
Hence to be purg'd, Souls pass the cleansing Flame,  
To fit them for the Test of Judge supreme.<sup>59</sup>

Brendan is commemorated in countless other ancient documents. In the Martyrology of Tallaght,<sup>60</sup> May 16, Marianus O'Gorman, writes of "Brendan, without a particle of pride," and Selbhach, in his metrical list of the Saints of Inisfail, praises:

Brendan, son of fair Findlug,  
And Mochuda, son of Findall,  
A holy pair with penitential countenances,  
Of the race of Ciar, son of Fergus.

But naturally most of the legends connected with Brendan's name relate to his wonderful voyage, or to events the scene of which is laid near by the sea. Even from the beginning he seems to have acquired a reputation for his roaming propensity, and there are innumerable references to it in Irish hagiology. In the Latin "Legenda," it is said of him, "voluit scrutari partes et fines oceani," and, in the life of St. Carthage of Lismore, the birth of that saint was prophesied by an angel to St. Brendan, "qui inuenit terram repromissionis sanctorum."<sup>61</sup> In the life of Laisren, Brendan is described as "peregre proficiscens," "Brendan that journeyeth far from home."<sup>62</sup> Likewise, in the life of St. Flannanus, reference is made to the "mira que in insulis maris oceani viderat (sc. Brendanus) atque narraverat."<sup>63</sup> St. Brendan made a pact of fraternity with St. Albanus, and when the mariner returned from his seven years' pilgrimage on the sea, Albanus visited him. The two saints spent several days together in friendly converse<sup>64</sup> and Brendan related all the wonderful things he had seen on the ocean. One day St. Brendan's ship sank at the mouth of the Shannon, near Limerick, and the son of the king of Britain, who was on the prow of the

<sup>59</sup> HARRIS-WARE, ii, 15-16.

<sup>60</sup> MORAN, *Acta S. Brendani*, p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> PLUMMER, *l. c.*, i, 170; *Codex Salman*.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 139.

<sup>63</sup> *Codex Salman.*, 649-650.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 531-534; PLUMMER, *l. c.*, I, 25, 29.

ship, was drowned. Then did St. Brendan send some of his disciples for St. Ruadanus, who came at their call, and, by his prayers, raised the ship; the son of the king was found asleep in the ship with Ruadanus' hood around his head so as to not feel the water.<sup>65</sup> In the life from which this episode is taken, we learn that the holy abbot Brendan had a cell not far from the monastery of Ruadanus, in a place called "Tulach Brenaind," "Brendan's mound," and the bell of each was heard in the cell of the other. After some time Brendan said, "Ruadanus and I cannot live in the same place," and he departed and came to Connaught. In the life of St. David<sup>66</sup> is an extraordinary exploit attributed to Brendan. St. Bairre, on his way home from venerating the relics of SS. Peter and Paul, at Rome, visited the holy man, David, and, since there was no favoring wind to drive his ship, he asked his host to lend him the horse on which he was accustomed to ride when performing his ecclesiastical duties. Having received David's blessing, Bairre mounted the horse and entered the sea, presumably between what are now St. David's Head, in Wales, and Cork, in Ireland. After he had proceeded a considerable distance, he met St. Brendan, "super marinum cetum miram ducebat vitam," "leading a wonderful life on the back of a sea animal." St. Brendan seeing the man riding on the sea, was astonished, and exclaimed, "The Lord is wonderful in his saints!" When the man on horseback came near, the two saints saluted each other, and Bairre explained how he came to be making use of a horse as a ship. When they had conversed for some time, Brendan said, "Go in peace, I will come to see David," and the two holy men parted company. This Bairre is undoubtedly St. Finnbarr, Patron of Cork, and it is not impossible that the sea tale in his case was suggested by the words which compose his name, *find* meaning 'white' and *barr* meaning 'head,' which were understood to refer to the white-caps of the sea. The same idea is expressed by reversing the order of the words, giving *barr-find*, of which the name Barintus, which is found in Latin documents and was originally the name of a sea-god, may be simply a latinization. Consequently when Geoffrey of Monmouth represents Barintus

<sup>65</sup> *Vita Sti. Ruadani, Codex Salm.*; PLUMMER, *o. c.*, ii, 244.

<sup>66</sup> *Rees, Cambro-Brit. Saints*, pp. 435-436.

as a pilot steering the ship in which the wounded Arthur and Taliessin are conveyed to the Fortunate Isles, he was probably only borrowing the name from some Celtic legends which he had read connected with the voyage of Saint Brendan. According to some sources, this Barintus, or another of the same name, of whom we shall have occasion to speak later, was a relative of Brendan.<sup>67</sup>

Though a Kerryman, the long low island of Inchiquin in Lough Corrib, County Galway, seems to have been Brendan's favorite place of abode when he was not on the ocean. Many legends are told of his sojourn in that place. One is of a monk who, during a quarrel between the brothers, was struck on the head and died of the wound. When Brendan saw the monk lying lifeless on the ground, he called him, and the dead man arose and approached, carrying the iron weapon with which he had been slain still sticking in his head. The saint asked him whether he desired to remain alive or to pass away to heaven, and he at once chose the latter. The scene of this miracle is still called, in Irish, "Leaba an tuillchinn," or, in Latin, "lectus perforati capitis."

At Annadown (Enach-duin) within sight of Inchiquin was the nunnery or Brig, Brendan's sister, of which she, who also became a saint, was abbess, and, with her, Brendan breathed his last. Early one morning St. Columcille, though far away in Iona, saw the soul of Brendan conveyed to heaven by a chorus of angels, and he summoned his servant Diormicius and said, "Hodie enim natalis est sancti Brendani dies,"<sup>68</sup> and gave orders to have a solemn Mass celebrated in his honor: "As Christ told His disciples of the sleep of Lazarus, so did St. Columcille foretell to his disciples the death of the holy Brendan."<sup>69</sup> Brendan's death is also recorded in these words in the Annals of the Four Masters: "Ascensio Brenaind in curru suo in aerem," and by the annalist Tigernach as follows: "Quies Brendain abbatis Cluainferta, die XVI Maii, aetatis sui 94." In Féilire Oengusso (*The Martyrology of Oengus*), under May 16, is chronicled: "Togairm

<sup>67</sup> *Revue Celtique*, xxii, 339; *Annales de Bretagne*, xv, 534.

<sup>68</sup> MORAN, *Acta Sti. Brendani*, 140; *Codex Salman.*, 851; *Acta Sanctorum*, Maii III, 596.

<sup>69</sup> PLUMMER, *l. c.*, i, 151.



Brénainn Chluana,” “The calling of Brendan of Cluain into the everlasting, victorious Kingdom.” According to others, Brendan was in his ninety-sixth year when the end came—the sea foam he had breathed on his voyages may help to explain his extreme old age. He is commemorated in the Calendar on May 16, and the year of his death is generally given as 576, though the authorities differ on this point. The Church has also consecrated the date of his “Egressio,” or first voyage, which was formerly celebrated on March 22 in Kerry. An Irish entry in a manuscript at Vienna,<sup>70</sup> in the handwriting of his celebrated countryman, Marianus Scottus, “Marianus the Irishman,” who<sup>3</sup> was Abbot of Ratisbon, contains a tender testimony that in his day (A. D. 1079) the memory of Brendan was not forgotten by Irish missionaries and scholars residing on the continent: “Feil Brenain innocht for Dardain. A impede fordia indilgud do Muiredach tróg;” “the feast of Brendan, this Thursday night (May 16, 1079). His intercession before God for forgiveness for poor Muiredach (Marianus).”

When Brendan felt that the end was at hand, he went to visit his sister. Among other things he taught her concerning the place of her resurrection. “Not here,” saith he to her, “shalt thou rise again, but in thine own land, even in Kerry. Therefore, go thou thither, for that people will gain the mercy of God by thy means. This is a place of men, not of women. Now is God calling me unto Himself out of the prison home of the body.” When she heard that, she was grievously saddened at his premonition of death and said, “Beloved father we shall all die at thy death. For which of us can live when thou art alive and absent, much less when thou art dead?” And Brendan saith, “On the third day hence, I shall go the way of my fathers.” Now that day was the Lord’s Day. Thereon, having made the sacrifice at the altar, he saith to them that stood by, “In your prayers, commend my going forth.” And Brig speaketh and saith, “Father, what fearest thou?” “I fear,” said he, “I shall journey alone, that the way should be dark; I fear the unknown region, the presence of the King, the sentence of the Judge.” After these things, he commanded the brethren to carry his body to the monastery of Clonfert secretly, lest, if they did it

<sup>70</sup> *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vii, 1857–1861, p. 300.

openly, it should be kept by them among whom they should pass. Then when he had kissed them all, one by one, he saith unto holy Briga, "Salute my friends on my behalf, and say unto them to beware of evil speaking even when it is true, how much the more when it is false." When he had so spoken and foretold how some things would be in time to come, he passed into everlasting rest in the ninety-sixth year of his age. This beautiful and touching trait is found only in one manuscript.<sup>71</sup> The scribes of the other copies omitted it perhaps because they considered that such human shrinking was unworthy of a saint. Indeed, the writer of the *Codex Salmanticensis* has added in the margin alongside this passage, "nota de timore."

The intense popularity enjoyed by the Brendan legend is shown by the wide range of places and persons stamped more or less consciously with, or influenced by, the name of its hero, such an English, Brandon, Brenton; German, Branden; Italian, Brandano, Brentano; Portuguese, Brandão. Our saint has many dedications in Scotland and has left his memory on the local nomenclature of some of the Western Islands.<sup>72</sup> In accordance with the legends which made him visit the Orkneys, the Hebrides and the Shetlands, he is sometimes commemorated as the "Apostle of the Scottish Isles," "Sanctus Brandanus Abbas Apostolus Orcadum et Scoticarum insularum." In the year 514, he is said to have founded a monastery "in regione Heth," which has been identified with the island Tyree (Lat. Terra Heth), and a cloister, Ailech, but whether that place was in Scotland (Perthshire), or in Brittany, or an island, is uncertain. St. Brandan's Hill overlooks the port of Bristol. On the island of Mull is Cuil-Bhrannain, "Brendan's Retreat," which is pointed out to this day, and the sound which separates Arran from Kintyre bears the name of Kilbrannan. There is also a church in the Island of Seil, off the coast of Lorn, dedicated to him. The island of Bute (found as Bót, in *Hákonar Saga*) is said to take its name from a bothy or cell which the saint erected on it. In Perthshire is "St. Brandon's Haven," and many churches in Mull, St. Kilda and other parts of Scotland still preserve his name.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> PLUMMER, *l. c.*, i, 150 note; *Codex Salman.*, pp. 771-772.

<sup>72</sup> FORBES, *Calendars*, 233, 286-287.

<sup>73</sup> O'HANLON, pp. 466-477.

According to the Irish sources, Brendan undertook a journey to, and spent some time in, Britain, as a penance after his seven years' voyage; and the lives<sup>74</sup> of his disciple Machutus, or Malo, say that, before the famous quest, he was founder and abbot of the celebrated monastery of Llancarvan, in Glamorganshire, and that it was from there that the voyage started. He has probably also left recollections of himself in the Isle of Man, and in the Church of St. Piran (which may be the Irish Ciaran), at Perranzabuloe, in Cornwall, is kept, among other treasures, a tooth of Saint Brendan. Many of the allusions in the Latin lives of Brendan to Britannia have been understood as referring, not to Britain, but, to Brittany, whither he is supposed to have gone from Wales or Cornwall, and where he founded an abbey not far from the beautiful city now called after the name of his pupil, St. Malo. Just at the entrance to the Bay of St. Malo is the fortified island Césembre (September),<sup>75</sup> which contains the grotto of St. Brendan. Numerous other places in Brittany keep his memory alive, though it does not necessarily mean that we must assume a visit of Brendan wherever we find a dedication or a festival to him. In the Gulf of Morbihan is l'Ile aux Moines, worthy of having been visited by St. Brendan and his companions. South of St. Brieuc, in the Côtes-du-Nord, is a village called by his name, and at least half a dozen other communities have him as their patron, such as Kerlouan, Lanvellec (in the canton of Pontrieux), Locbrévalaire, St. Broladre, St. Brandan, Trégrom, and Broladre, in Normandy. According to the popular Breton almanacs, St. Brendan is invoked for the cure of sores and ulcers. His legend has even penetrated into the Orient. In a very old and defective Irish poem going back to the early part of the tenth century, found written on the lower margin of two pages of the Book of Leinster,<sup>76</sup> and which may be but a fragment of a lost life of Brendan, an unknown person addresses a welcome to the saint and celebrates him for having traveled to the far-off land of Ceylon, and, as a "pilgrim of Ireland," to the cold waters of the Jordan, to Mount Zion, the cities of Greece, to Rome and

<sup>74</sup> *Deux Vies inéd.*, pp. 37, 46, 132, 139.

<sup>75</sup> *Prima Vita Sti. Mach.*

<sup>76</sup> *Book of Leinster*, pp. 366, 369; *Sitzungsberichte der Kgl. preuss. Akad.*, 9 Mai 1912, pp. 436-443; *Zeitschrift für celtische Philol.*, ix, 187.

Tours. The poem begins: "Mochen, mochen, a Brénaind, a breó rochloss co Lletha," "Welcome, welcome, O Brendan, flame whose praise was heard to Gaul. Welcome, Lord of Cluain, to whom the victories of the world do service," and concludes with the following lines:

Áillge deit indá midól  
 Ocus fáilte fri fledól  
 Tú it luing ó ailén d' aileón  
 Rom chrideón is mochenón.

Dearer to thee than quaffing mead and good cheer at banquet, is it to sail in thy boat from island to island. Welcome, my heart.

As might be expected, the places most closely associated with Brendan's name are in southwest Munster, and more particularly in his native County Kerry, of which he is the patron. Such places are very numerous. On Valentia Island is a well-known cliff called Colbha, which means literally "a bed post," with a natural fissure along its face, where, so tradition says, St. Brendan landed after one of his voyages. Brandon's Bay, with its oval beach, is some 5 miles west of Castlegregory. A few miles north of Dingle and near the wind-blown coast is the cloud-capped Mount Brandon, Cnoc Bhréantháin, as the old people call it, the second highest mountain in Ireland. From this lofty eminence the sight is truly grand. Almost at the foot of the mountain the Atlantic dashes itself into foam and spray on the tall precipitous headlands. From that point the saint is said to have scanned the broad expanse of the "Mare Brendanicum," as that ocean has since his day been called, toward the setting sun and the longed for Land of Promise. Not far away are Brandon Peak, one of the highest mountains in County Kerry, with Brendon's Oratory and Brendon's Well on its summit, Brandon Head, and, on one of the Blasquets, the westernmost of all Irish islands, is the Cloghan, where the sailor-saint is believed to have lived for some time. For a long time the inhabitants regarded the western slopes of Brandon Mountain so sacred as not to allow any animal to be killed there, except fish in certain rivulets, which was given to the poor and had to be eaten at once. The cattle, wild deer and boars which lived there were unmolested and the birds and hares were nearly tame. The people of the Dingle peninsula

imagine some religious connection between Kilmalchedar, near which is Fotharach Brandain, "the Ruins of Brendan's House," mentioned in the saga of Cellachan of Cashel, and Brandon Mountain. Near Cahirciveen are several beehive-shaped houses and an old church, and, on the island of Innistooskert, in the foaming Atlantic beyond Mayo, is a stone cell believed to have been built by St. Brendan. Proceeding north we find on Inishglora, St. Brendan's Oratory, and it is said that sailors from Mayo when sailing by Inishglora used to lower their sails in honor of St. Brendan. Near the church and monastery of Ardfert is a clear spring of water called Brandon Well, which is reputed to be holy, and there is also a townland of the same name in the parish of Ardfert.

The earliest extant account of the life and adventures of Brendan dates from at least 500 years after the events are said to have taken place. The first mention of a sea voyage made by our saint is found in the two instances quoted above in connection with the life of St. Brigit, where he is spoken of as "navigans mare" and "quaerens terram repromissionis," and in the entry in the ninth century Martyrology of Tallaght, March 22, "egressio familiae Brendani." Leaving aside the belief which was current in the twelfth century, that Brendan himself left behind a written account of his adventures, and a Latin life of the saint which Washington Irving<sup>77</sup> and others, on what authority we do now know, assert once existed in the archives of the Cathedral in the Grand Canary, and such scattered notions of a legendary quality as are found in the lives of saints already referred to, our main sources of information on the subject are the following: First, the incomplete Irish *Betha Brendain*, "Life of Brendan," which is found in the Book of Lismore, a fifteenth century manuscript.<sup>78</sup> A fragment of this *Betha*, closely resembling the Lismore text, is found in a nineteenth century manuscript containing the life of St. Finan.<sup>79</sup> The *Betha Brenainn* is not an original work but essentially a Middle Irish production which could not have arisen before the end of the eleventh or the

<sup>77</sup> *Life of Columbus*, Appendix.

<sup>78</sup> Text and translation by Whitley Stokes, *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*; text, pp. 99-116; translation, pp. 247-261; notes, pp. 349-354.

<sup>79</sup> *Zeitschrift für celtische Philol.*, ii, 564-565.

beginning of the twelfth century. Moreover, the fact that it is not mentioned among the *Immramha*, or "Sea-Voyages," in the old catalogues of Irish literature, is significant. Its prototype may be lost; at all events, though it contains material not found elsewhere, it shows the influence of other versions and can by no means be regarded as the source of the later texts. There are also Irish versions in two manuscripts at Brussels, in the British Museum and in the *Liber Flavus Fergusorum*, in the Royal Irish Academy.<sup>80</sup> Our second main source of information is the Latin "Vita Brendani," which is preserved in several manuscripts, and the third is the Latin *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, of which there are numerous versions<sup>81</sup> and which would appear to have been known on the continent before they were known in Ireland. The oldest form of the *Navigatio* thus far discovered is found in a British Museum manuscript<sup>82</sup> which dates from the tenth century, but which is clearly a copy of a yet earlier manuscript. It has been alleged that a version also exists in a ninth century manuscript in the Vatican Library, but this statement has not been proved. The unknown author of the *Navigatio* composed his compilation out of whatever material he had at hand, and, to fill up the events of the seven years' voyage already ascribed to Brendan, he drew chiefly from the Voyage of Maelduin and other Irish sea voyages, and, for the description of heaven and hell, he had recourse to such Irish tales as the Vision of Adamnan and the Tidings of Doomsday. These three main versions differ much from one another. The Latin recension in John Capgrave's *Nova Legenda Anglie* (London, 1516) was compiled from the *Acta Brendani*.

Some idea of the marvelous popularity and spread of the Brendan story may be got by considering the number of extant manuscripts which contain it, and the number of translations, transformations and imitations which have been made of it. It was probably Irish monks who first carried it to the continent, where it enjoyed even greater vogue than at home and where it

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<sup>80</sup> Egerton, 1781. For these MSS., see O'CURRY, *On the Manuscript Materials*, p. 533.

<sup>81</sup> *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, ix, 75 ff.; *Romanische Forschungen*, vii, 1893, 1-48.

<sup>82</sup> Additional, 36736.

was believed and read and listened to with feverish admiration and afforded entertainment for centuries. It would seem as if every great monastic and public library of medieval Europe possessed it in some form or other, and it has been treated in almost every modern European language. The Spanish and Portuguese versions mentioned by Jubinal<sup>83</sup> (the statement has been repeated by Douhet<sup>84</sup> and others) have not been discovered, unless possibly in sea tales in which the name of the hero is St. Amaro. The most famous of the redactions in a popular language of the Middle Ages is the Anglo-Norman poem which was composed by a certain Donz Beneeiz, about the year 1121 for, and dedicated to, Adelaide of Louvain, shortly after her marriage as second wife of Henry I, "Beauclerc," of England. The work is clearly a translation, but of what is uncertain, unless it be of some version of the Latin *Navigatio*. It is the second oldest Norman poem written on English soil. The opening lines in which the poet, who was perhaps a bishop, expresses the hope that Lady Aelis will bless England with religion, justice and peace, are as follows:

Donna Aaliz la reine,  
 Par qui valdrat lei divine,  
 Par qui creistrat lei de terre,  
 E remandrat tante guerre  
 Por les armes Henri lu rei  
 E par le cunseil qui ert en tei,  
 Salvet tei mil e mil feiz  
 Li apostoiles danz Benediz  
 Que comandas ço ad enpris,  
 Secund sun sens entremis,  
 En letre mis e en romanz,  
 E si cum fud li teons cumanz,  
 De Saint Brendan, le bon abeth;  
 Mais tu l' defent ne seit gabeth.

There are many other French versions in verse and prose. Next to the Anglo-Norman poem in order of age is the Flemish prose version, *De Saint Brandainne le moïn*, dating from the end of the twelfth century, and to about the same period belongs a French poem entitled *De Saint Brandans qui erre vii ans par*

<sup>83</sup> Page x.

<sup>84</sup> Pages 278-279.

*mer et les merveilles qu'il trouve.* The version in an Arsenal MS. begins:

Seignor, oiés que jo dirai,  
D'un saint home vos conterai:  
D'Yrlande estoit, Brandans ot non,  
Molt ert de grant religion.

There is a short version dating from the fifteenth century in Old Provençal, which is an abridgment from a Latin "*Legenda in Festo Sti Brendani.*" According to it our saint, who is called "Sant Branda, lo sant baro," was possessed of a desire "to see the relics of the saints." It contains some curious mistakes. For instance, the name Ahenda is given to an island instead of to the holy man, Aende, who dwelt in it. Its only reference to the whale-island is a misunderstanding of the Latin "*in dorso bellue,*" which it renders "*en la ciutat de Velluer,*" thus making it the name of a city. Another interesting Romance group consists of four Italian texts dating from the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, of which one is in old Venetian, and another in Tuscan, prose.<sup>85</sup> In several respects the Venetian version differs from the Latin *Navigatio*, its description of hell being especially graphic, for example, where the demons call out the various torments which await their victims: "E oldiua bosie che sonaua dir: al fuoco, al fuoco; altri diseua; al' aqua, al' aqua; altri diseua: liga, liga; altri diseua: muora, muora, tuti di nostri nemisi che se serui de dio! . . . E oldiua bosie che diseua: rosti, rosty, meti in fuoco, baty, baty, taia, taia, siega, siega, strenzi, strenzi." The influence of the Brendan story is seen more or less directly elsewhere in Italian literature, as in the description of the enchanted gardens in Boiardo's *Orlando Inammorato* and in Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*, while Armida's garden in which Tasso represents Rinaldo as detained has been identified with St. Brendan's Fortunate Island.<sup>86</sup> Other poems merely mention Brendan as a figure well known in medieval literary circles. The following lines in the *Roman de Renart*,<sup>87</sup> where the Fox, disguised as a Breton minstrel, says:

<sup>85</sup> *La Leggenda di S. Brandano*, P. VILLARI, *Antiche Leggende e Tradizioni che illustrano la "Divina Commedia,"* pp. 82-109, Pisa, 1865; NOVATI, *Navigatio Brendani*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>86</sup> *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Canto xvi.

<sup>87</sup> I, 2389 ff.



Ge fot savoir bon lai breton  
 Et de Merlin et de Noton,  
 Del roi Artu et de Tristan,  
 De chevrefoil, de Saint Brandan,

are important as showing that in the thirteenth century there existed a French *lai* on St. Brendan and that his legend was regarded, incorrectly of course, as belonging to the Arthurian cycle. In Chrétien de Troies *Yvain*<sup>88</sup> there is a passage describing the numerous birds on trees "singing Mass," a motive which seems to be borrowed from the "Paradysus Avium" or "Fowelen Parays," in the Bredan story. Again<sup>89</sup> Chrétien describes birds singing canticles. Consequently, he must have been acquainted with the Voyage of St. Brendan and with the idea, common in Celtic belief, of souls appearing in the form of birds. Furthermore, the Brendan legend is closely related to the literature of vision, of which it forms an important chapter and, possibly in ways yet to be discovered, it will be found to throw some light on the Grail romances. In Pseudo-Chrétien, for example, Perceval's mother is described as going on pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Brendan.<sup>90</sup>

There are two renditions of the Brendan story in early English, one, in verse, belonging to the fourteenth century, the other being Wynkyn de Worde's prose redaction of two hundred years later. Caxton, the first English printer, published a translation of the Brendan Voyage in 1483, so that it was among the very first books printed in English. A most interesting group of vulgar versions consists of those in German and Dutch, and an Old Norse fragment which seems to be Norwegian with an Icelandic coloring. By the end of the twelfth century arose a Middle Frankish poem, now lost, from which grew all the German versions. Most closely related to it is a Middle Dutch poem of the first half of the thirteenth century, *Van Sinte Brandane*, the original of which is lost. Also to the twelfth century belongs another recension of the Middle Frankish, which is represented by the poem, *Von Sente Brandan*, and probably arose on the right bank of the lower Main. In the fourteenth century was

<sup>88</sup> Lines 471-472; *Zeitschrift für vergleich. Litteraturgeschichte*, XI, 492-498.

<sup>89</sup> Lines 384 ff.

<sup>90</sup> ALFRED NUTT, *The Legend of the Holy Grail*, 265; *Revue Celtique*, X, 347.

composed the Low German version, *Van dem hilgen Sunte Brandan*. The German prototype may go back to a lost Latin redaction of the *Navigatio*, which differed from the existing version. It is just as likely, however, that the German redactor got the story from one of the many Irish monks who were along the middle and lower Rhine in the twelfth century.<sup>91</sup> There are reminiscences of St. Brendan in the *Lohengrin*, the *Wartburgkrieg*<sup>92</sup> and other old German poems. In the Middle High German poem by Moriz von Craon, we read

Ich waene sant Brandan  
Durch wunder her geværn ist.

I think St. Brendan has come here by a miracle.

Many German chap books were printed on the life and adventures of Brandan. One which appeared at Augsburg about 1475 is entitled *Sant Brandon Legend: Hir hebt sich an sand Brandon's Buch was er wunders erfahren hat*.<sup>93</sup> Others, with almost identical titles, such as *Ein hübsch lieblich lesen von sant Brandon, was er wunders uff dem mör erfahren hat*, were published at Basel, Ulm, and Strassburg. The Strassburg print of 1510 contains woodcuts representing Brendan throwing his books into the flames, and relates how he made a ship well bound with iron, after the fashion of Noah's ark, and took on board great stores of food and clothing for twelve years and consecrated a chapel on board. It shows Judas Iscariot sitting on a half-hot, half-cold stone, half-frozen and half-roasted. In the German versions the motive of Brendan's voyage is explained in an original manner. One day he read in a rare book a description of all sorts of impossible things, of three heavens, two paradises, nine purgatories, monsters of the deep and such like extravagances, which so disgusted the good man that in anger he threw the book into the fire. Then an angel appeared to him and chided him for his incredulity, saying, "Why hast thou despised the truth? Knowest thou not that God can do greater wonders than thou hast read of in the book?" As a penance he was made to wander for seven years on the ocean in order that he might see with his own eyes the wonders which had seemed to him so incredible, and after-

<sup>91</sup> *Literaturblatt für germ. u. roman. Philol.*, 1919, p. 82.

<sup>92</sup> Edit. M. Haupt, 1871, l. 884-885.

<sup>93</sup> *The Irish Book Lover*, ix, 133.

wards to describe what he had witnessed. In Ireland, too, we find that Brendan had acquired, as early at least as the first half of the twelfth century, the reputation of being a doubter, for in a litany in the Book of Leinster he is called the Irish "Thomas Apostolus."

In a group of Irish versions,<sup>94</sup> Brendan's voyage is motivated in a more poetic manner. Once the twelve apostles of Erin were learning with Findan of Clonard and he had prepared a feast for them. And when the feast was at its height the guests saw a wondrous large flower appear, as a sign from the Land of Promise. They disputed as to who should go to seek the land of the flower, but no one claimed it more than another, and they cast lots in pairs and it fell to the lot of the two Brendans. These two then decided between them and Brendan of Birr was chosen, and all felt sore at heart that the oldest of the saints of Ireland should go "into the maw of the sea and of the great ocean." Our Brendan then volunteered to undertake the journey. Other Irish lives state that it was the words spoken at his ordination, "And every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall possess life everlasting," (Matt., xix, 29) and those other words, "Exi de terra tua et cognatione tua" (Acts, vii, 3) which left so deep an impression on his mind that he asked the Lord to give him a secret land in the sea removed from men. And as he slept he heard a voice saying, "Brandane, exaudita est postulatio tua a Domino," and again, "Brandane, fiet tibi secundum desiderium tuum." According to some French versions, the Arsenal manuscript for example,<sup>95</sup> Brendan prayed God to show him the paradise where Adam first lived, and also hell. One version of the life of St. Malo<sup>96</sup> explains that it was not out of a desire to see marvelous things but to escape from the envy and jealousy of their comrades that Brendan and his young disciple decided to sail to the solitary islands. The usual exordium, however, is that one day Brendan was visited by his master, Barintus, whose foster son, Mernoc,

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<sup>94</sup> Gorman's *Martyrology*, ix, x; Egerton, 1781; Liber Flavus Fergus., and two Brussels MSS.; *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, X, 1915, pp. 408-420.

<sup>95</sup> *Zeitschrift für Roman. Philol.*, II, 1878, pp. 438-457.

<sup>96</sup> *Annales de Bretagne*, xxii, 709.

had retired to a solitary place in the promised land of the saints where he found a very delectable island. Mernoc had persuaded his foster father to accompany him on one of those voyages. In the Middle English version, Brendan chides Barintus for his sadness:<sup>97</sup> "And saynt Brandon comforted him the best wyse he coude, sayenge, 'Ye come hyther for to be joyful with me, and therefore for Goddes love leve your mournynge, and tell me what mervayles ye have seen in the grete see ocean, that compasseth all the worlde aboute, and all other waters comen out of hym, whiche renneth in all the partyes of the erth.'"

Let the Irish life tell us how Brendan and his companions put to sea:

So Brendan, son of Findlug, sailed then over the wave-voice of the strong-maned sea, and over the storm of the green-sided waves and over the mouth of the marvelous, awful, bitter ocean, where they saw the multitude of the furious red-mouthed monsters, with abundance of great sea-whales. And they found beautiful, strange islands, and yet they tarried not therein.<sup>98</sup>

And they took no provisions with them, for they trusted that God would sustain them wheresoever they might go, and they sailed wherever the wind carried them; time, distance and direction meant nothing to them.

Now when the Easter was nigh, his crew kept saying to Brendan that he should go on land to celebrate the Easter. "God," saith Brendan, "is able to give us land in any place that He pleases." Now after the Easter was come, the great sea-beast raised his shoulder on high over the storm and over the wave-voice of the sea so that it was level, firm land, like a field equally smooth, equally high. And they go forth upon that land, and they celebrate the Easter there, even one day and two nights.<sup>98</sup>

So far, the Lismore Irish account of this, the best known, episode of the Brendan legend. The Latin and Romance versions, however, especially the Old Venetian, describe the sea monster in greater detail. The remainder of the adventure may best be told in its Middle English setting:

Hi makede fur and soden hem fisch in a caudroun faste.

Er this fisch were i-sode, somdel hi were agaste.

For tho this fur was thurf hot, the yle quakede anon,

And with gret eir hupte al up; this monekes dradde echon.

<sup>97</sup> Edit. Wright, p. 35.

<sup>98</sup> Stokes' translation, with slight changes.

Hi bihulde hou the yle in the see wende faste,  
 And as a quic thing hupte up and down, and that fur fram him caste.  
 Hi suam more than tui myle while this fur i-laste.  
 The monekes i-seze the fur wel longe, and were sore agaste;  
 Hi cride zurne on seint Brendan, what the wonder were.  
 "Beoth stille," quath this gode man, "for nozt ze nabbe fere!  
 Ze weneth that hit beo an yle, ac ze thencheth amis;  
 Hit is a fisch of this grete see, the gretteste that ther is,  
 Jascom he is i-cleped, and fondeth nigt and dai  
 To putte his tail in his mouth, ac for gretnisse he ne mai."<sup>99</sup>

The whale-island was a very popular myth in the Middle Ages, and many references to it are found in the literature of the time. It is seriously referred to in an Irish poem describing the characteristic virtues of the Irish saints and among them the rigor of Brendan's rule.<sup>100</sup> This poem has been attributed to Cuimin of Condeire, Bishop of Noendruim, †658, but its language points to the twelfth rather than to the seventh century. It begins, "Carais Brenainn biothcrábudh."

Brendan loved lasting devotion,  
 According to the synod and assembly;  
 Seven years on the great beast's back he spent:  
 It was a difficult mode of devotion.

The Irish writers may have got the fancy of the whale-island from the Anglo-Saxon version of a Latin *Physiologus*, and it is found in connection with other saints, as well as with Brendan.<sup>101</sup> A somewhat similar notion occurs in Greek, in Lucian's *Traveller's Tale*, and in Norse in the idea of the midgard serpent, the great kraken, a form of the underlying world-serpent which figures so largely in the mythic cosmogony of the Scandinavians, but it is by no means to be regarded merely as a development of a kenning for a ship, and of viking origin. Rodolphus Glaber, who wrote his *Historia Sui Temporis* <sup>102</sup> about the year 1047, but borrowed his reference from a text we know not how much earlier, thus describes the whale adventure of Brendan: "At even Brendan and his companions saw an island and they went on it to pass the night and sleep; but Brendan remained on watch, and he

<sup>99</sup> WRIGHT, pp. 8-9.

<sup>100</sup> *Lismore Lives*, l.3611 ff.; *Zeitschrift für celt. Philol.*, I, 62.

<sup>101</sup> BILLY's *Life*, ch. xxvi; *Anonymous Life*, ch. xiii.

<sup>102</sup> Book ii, ch. 2; *Zeitschrift für celt. Philol.*, v, 137.

saw that the island on which they were moved eastward. They spent several days on their island-ship which brought them at last to a wonderful island." In the Anglo-Saxon version in the *Codex Exoniensis*<sup>103</sup> the monster is called "Fastitocalon," "the ocean floater," where ships cast anchor and sailors go ashore and make a fire, whereupon the whale dives down and ship and crew are drowned. The same story, together with a number of other extravaganzas on the Brendan legend, is found in the *Peregrinatio Ioan. Hesei ab Hierusalem instituta*, Antuerpiae, 1565.

A definition of the sea-beast which received general acceptance in the Middle Ages is given in a few lines by Philippe de Thaun in his Anglo-Norman *Bestiaire*; and almost in the same words in Italian prose by Brunetto Latini in his *Tesoretto*, which was composed about the year in which Dante was born. The former is as follows:

Cetus ceo est mult grant beste, tut tens en mer converse;  
 Le salbon de mer prent, sur son dos l' estent,  
 Sur mer s' esdreceat, en pais si esterat.  
 Li notuners la veit, quide que ille soit,  
 Illoc vait ariver sun cunrei aprester.  
 Li balain le fu sent e le nef e la gent:  
 Lores se plungerat, si il pot, si's neierat.

Cetus is a great fish which most people call whale. This fish raises his back in the high sea and will lie so long in one place that the wind brings sand and spreads it on his back and thereon grow trees and little shrubs. Seafarers are often deceived by it, for they think that it is an island where they land and drive stakes and make a fire to prepare their meals, but when the fish feels the heat he cannot bear it, but will plunge down to the sea and drown all that he has on him.<sup>104</sup>

The Old Norse fragment reads:

"Kynlict thykeir ythr, hui æý thessi ferr sia?" Tha suorothu thæir honum: "Oss thykkir einka kynlekt, oc rædder eru ver um for æyiar thessar." Tha suarathi B.: "Bœrn min, verit eigi rædder, guth syndi mer i nótt, huat that iartegnier; that er eigi eý, er ver bioggum i, that er fiskr, sa er mestr er i hæminum, oc ferr at leita at sporthi sinum oc villdi koma ollu saman sporthi oc hofthi, oc má eigi, sua er hawn mykill, enn hann heitir a bok Jaskonius."

"Wonderful, ye think, that the island so travels." Then they answered him: "It seems very wonderful and fearful to us, because of

<sup>103</sup> Ed. Thorpe, London, 1842; Early English Text Society, No. 104.

<sup>104</sup> WRIGHT, *The Percy Society*, p. 60.

the movement of the island." Then answered Brandan: "My children, be not afraid. God hath disclosed to me last night what this meaneth: It is no island on which we were; it is a fish that is the greatest in the world, and it strives to reach its tail and bring head and tail together, but it is so large that it cannot, and it is called in a book, Jaskonius."

This fable suggested a bold simile to Milton where, in *Paradise Lost*, he likens Satan to

that sea-beast  
 Leviathan, whom God of all his works  
 Created hugest that swim the ocean stream;  
 Him, haply, slumbering on the Norway foam,  
 The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff,  
 Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,  
 With fixèd anchor in his scaly rind,  
 Moors by his side under the lee . . .<sup>105</sup>

Even in the Orient we find the same fancy or something similar to it. In the ancient Indian myths there is a story of a girl sailing over the waves on the leaf of a water lily.<sup>106</sup> In the Middle Dutch Brendan, the saint meets a man who was only a thumb long, floating on a leaf and holding a little bowl in his right hand and a pointer in his left. The pointer he kept dipping into the sea and letting the water drop from it into the bowl; when the bowl was full, he emptied it out and began filling it up again; and that was his doom, to be measuring the sea until judgment day.<sup>107</sup> Among the tales that occur in the Talmud is one told by Rabba, how one day he and his companions saw a whale, and earth and sand were on it. They disembarked and baked and cooked on its back; but when the fire became hot, the beast turned over, and if the ship had not been near they would all have been drowned.<sup>108</sup> The episode is found also in the *Zend Avesta*<sup>109</sup> and, in more modern times, there is the picture of the fish-island described by Ariosto in the *Orlando Furioso*,<sup>110</sup>

"Veggiamo una balena . . ."

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<sup>105</sup> *Paradise Lost*, i, 201-207.

<sup>106</sup> MÜLLENHOFF, p. 340; NANSSEN, ii, 234.

<sup>107</sup> JACOB GRIMM, *Deutsche Mythol.*, 3 edit., i, 420; STALLYBRASS'S trans., ii, 451  
 BLOMMAERT'S *Oudvlaemsche Gedichten*, i, 118b; ii, 26a; *Revue Celtique*, vi, 214.

<sup>108</sup> FREUDENTHAL, BENFEY.

<sup>109</sup> J. DARMESTETER, i, p. 88.

<sup>110</sup> Canto VI, st. 37 fl.

There we behold a mighty whale, of size  
 The hugest yet in any waters seen;  
 More than eleven paces, to our eyes,  
 His back appears above the surface green:  
 And (for still firm and motionless he lies,  
 And such the distance his two ends between)  
 We all are cheated by the floating pile,  
 And idly take the monster for an isle.<sup>111</sup>

But the instance of the fable with which everybody is familiar is found in the story of Sindbad in *The Thousand and One Nights*. There has been much discussion whether the whale episode was transmitted to the Arabs from Ireland or the reverse, or, if the imagination of two peoples of such different cultures as the Irish and the Arabs created it independently. We must allow that there are many other striking resemblances between the Sindbad story and the story of Brendan, and it is not improbable that there was some reciprocal borrowing between the two peoples. Another possible explanation is that an Irish monk traveling in the East told the story of Brendan or heard the story of Sindbad, and that in that way the fable passed from one literature to the other. It can scarcely be doubted, however, that the Arabian geographer, Edrisi, who wrote about the year 1150 at the Court of the Norman King, Roger II of Sicily, and mentions a Sheep Island, an Island of Birds, and other scenes belonging to the Brendan story, got his knowledge of these wonders from one of the Latin or Romance Brendan versions which were current on the continent in the twelfth century. Valuable testimony to the Irish origin of the fable is afforded by the name given to the leviathan in all the versions of the story except in the Irish itself. In the latter it is called merely "Míl mór," "the great beast"; elsewhere it bears the name Jasconius, Jascon, Gasconius, Jascon, Iastoyn, or Yeson, all of which are neither more nor less than the latinization of the Irish word *iasc*, "a fish." In the Anglo-Norman version this word has again reverted to a common noun, *li jascoines*. The whale-island is even depicted on early maps and manuscripts of the Brendan story, for example, in a copy of Richard Fournival's *Bestiaire d' Amour*,<sup>112</sup> which contains two illustrations showing Brendan's

<sup>111</sup> Rose's translation.

<sup>112</sup> P. GAFFAREL, *Découverte de l'Amérique*, Paris, 1892, I, 256.



ship moored along-side the whale, and two monks sitting on the beast's back and a blazing fire between them. But the most detailed picture of the scene is found on a map accompanying a book written in 1621 by a Benedictine monk in the monastery of Seittenstött, in lower Austria.<sup>113</sup> The map is in other respects also largely fanciful, but shows "Hispania" and "Cabo Finis Terrae" in fairly correct position. Northwest of "Cabo Finis Terrae," in the ocean, is an island of irregular shape, extending from east to west and bearing the legend "Is. S. Brandano." To the southwest is a group of seven islands labeled "Insulae Fortunatae," only one of which, the center one of the group, is named, "M. Canarie." Between this group and "Is. S. Brandano" is an enormous sea-beast making towards Gibraltar, with curved tusks, a thin beard, a collar of scalloped skin around its neck, and spouting great streams of water from two openings in its forehead. It propels itself by means of huge fins, and its tail, which terminates in a two-forked tuft, is curled up over on its back. Standing round are four vessels built like Chinese junks, with a capacious cabin fore and aft, and with four or five banks of oars, one or two masts and a flag flying from them. In the foreground is a boat in which a monk with a halo around his head stands and paddles, while two other monks sit in the stern perusing a book. The largest ship in the fleet rests athwart the whale near its tail with a ladder reaching down to its back; on its shoulder an altar has been erected; a chalice and crucifix stand in the middle with a lighted candle at either side. The celebrant, wearing Mass vestments, kneels before the altar, and around him seven men, all dressed in the Spanish style of the seventeenth century, have found lodgment for their knees in the scales of the marine monster.

After their first fright, Brendan's sailors are on good terms with Jasconius, the obliging king of fishes, and wherever they might be, when the Easter of every year was at hand, the whale would heave up his back so that it was dry and solid land, "and anone they sawe theyr caudron upon the fysshes backe whiche they had left there xij monethes to-fore."<sup>114</sup> On their second

<sup>113</sup> *Nova Typis Transacta Navigatio Novi Orbis Indiae Occidentalis*. HONORIOUS PHILOPONUS, *Navig. Patrum ord. S. Benedicti*, facing page 13.

<sup>114</sup> English prose version, ed. T. Wright, p. 45.

voyage, the mariners experienced a similar marvel. As they rode nimbly over the ocean they beheld a monstrous animal swimming after them: "As big as a brazen cauldron was each of his two eyes, a boar's tusks had he; furzy hair upon him; and he had the maw of a leopard with the strength of a lion and the rage of a hound. . . . Then a huge sea whale arose between them and yon monstrous sea beast. And each of them began drowning the other, and battling savagely, till each of them drowned the other in the depth of the sea, and neither of the twain was seen thenceforward."<sup>115</sup>

After some further adventures, the pious sea-farers reach the Isle of Paradise, which they have sought so perseveringly for the space of seven years. Here the Irish narrative comes to an end, and we shall have to fall back upon the Latin, Romance and Germanic versions for an account of the other incidents of the voyage, each step of which is a wonder. It is not the purpose of this study, however, to follow our pious sea-farer over all the seas he sailed nor to describe in detail the marvels the tale tells of: the Isle of the Sleepy Well, the Isle of Grapes, the Sheep Island, where the animals governed themselves according to laws of their own. On one island was a beautiful grove covered with trees, flowers and fruits; as the sun rose, the trees peeped out of the ground, and little by little grew with the sun till noon when they stopped an instant, and then, as soon as the sun had passed the zenith, the trees began to dwindle, so that when the sun had set beneath the horizon the grove too had disappeared in the earth and there was no sign to show where it had been. Another was the Isle of Silence, wherein no voice was heard. Whoever needed anything knelt before the master, who took a style and tablet and, by revelation from God, wrote his answer to what the other had asked for in his heart. There the altar lamps never grew less and were lighted by a flaming arrow which flew in at the window from the sky. Each island was inhabited by saints who were nourished in a miraculous manner, and who spent their time in prayer, fasting and singing.

In the grete see of occian forth hi rewe faste,  
And triste al to oure Loverdes grace, and nothing nere agaste.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Stokes' translation, with slight changes. *Lismore Lives*, pp. 113, 258.

<sup>116</sup> WRIGHT, *o. c.*, p. 5.

and the travelers came to the Paradise of Birds where they conversed with the souls of the angels who remained neutral at the time of Lucifer's rebellion: "And on every bough sate a fayre byrde, and they sate so thicke on the tree that unneth ony lefe of the tree myght be seen, the nombre of them was so grete, and they songe so meryly that it was an hevenly noyse to here. Wherefore saynt Brandon kneled down on his knees, and wepte for joye, and made his prayers devoutly unto our Lord God to knowe what these byrdes ment. And than anone one of the byrdes fledde fro the tree to saynt Brandon, and he with flykerynge of his wynges made a full mery noyse like a fydle, that hym semed he herde never so joyful a melodye." In the Book of Lismore<sup>117</sup> is a poem in Irish, beginning "Dia do betha, a Brenainn, sunn," "Welcome here, O Brendan," addressed by the "senior" of an island, in welcome to Brendan and his crew. The "senior" relates how he came to be there, how he and his companions, twelve in all, had left Ireland "seeking heaven," and that all but himself had died. He revealed to the saints-errant the land they sought, even the Land of Promise, and then, having partaken of Christ's Body and His Blood, he went to heaven. One day the wind bore Brendan's boat northward to a horrid island. When they had come to within a stone's throw of it, they heard a great puffing and blowing of bellows, and a striking of sledges on anvils. But they could see nothing, wherefore they were sore afraid and blessed them oft. Then behold one of the islanders appeared and he was all hideous and black and burning with fire. And when he caught sight of Brendan's crew he stared full ghastly on them with great, staring eyes and hurried back to his forge, shouting "Ho! ho!" and, at that, all the dwellers of that island ran to the shore bearing iron tongs and glowing massy balls of fire which they hurled at the servants of Christ. But they harmed them not, but the sea, where they fell, seethed and hissed like a cauldron full of red hot coals. Wherefore the fiends roared and hurried back and fired their smithies, and all the island and the sea seemed one mass of fire, and all that day and night the terrified travelers saw the flames and heard the awful wailing and howling of the demons. They hoisted the sail, had out the oars and made haste away from that dreadful isle.

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<sup>117</sup> Stokes' edition, pp. 113-114.

On the Feast of St. Peter they came to a place where the sea was perfectly clear. And under the water was a great city with castles and towers, and myriads of sea monsters and fishes, in the shape of all the beasts of the earth, lay on the bed of the ocean motionless, as if they were asleep, and each with the tail of another in its mouth. The monks were sore afraid and counseled Brendan to speak softly lest he wake the fishes and they break the ship. But the God-fearing admiral laughed and told them to fear not, and then, in the words of the Venetian version, "he began to sing the most he could, and as soon as he had begun the Mass, all the fishes arose round about the ship and some went under the waves and others stood out of the water like gnats on wine, and not one of them touched the ship but swam around it here and there at a respectful distance until the Mass had been sung, when they disappeared. The sailors next skirted the "Smoky Mountain," and after sailing due south a course of seven days, they came upon some strange-looking object standing out of the sea. According to the Provençal version, when they saw it from afar, some of them thought it was a wreck of a boat and others said it was a dead fish. The same doubt is expressed in a Dutch version which is literally translated from the Latin.<sup>118</sup> "Somich van den brueders sechden, dat het een vogel waer; somich waenden dat het een scepe waer; ende die man Gods hoerden dat si daer van, ende sechte: 'En wilt niet twisten; stuert dat scepe tot die stede'."<sup>119</sup> On coming nearer they descried that it was a rock, and thereon sat a shaggy, misshapen man. Before his face hung a cloth the size of a bag, supported between two iron poles, wherewith the wind and the waves smote him upon the eyes and up to the crown of his head, as a little skiff is struck by the tempest. When again the waves fell away they laid bare the rock whereon the unhappy man sat. The Anglo-Saxon<sup>120</sup> description deserves to be quoted:

A wrechedde gost, naked & bar, in meseise inouz:  
 Aboue him was a cloth iteid: myd twei tongen vaste,  
 The nether ende tilde to is chynne; ouer al the wynd it caste,  
 Tht (wan tht) water him with drouz tht cloth, tht heng so heie,

<sup>118</sup> JUBINAL, p. 43.

<sup>119</sup> MOLTZEN, p. 33.

<sup>120</sup> Ashmolan, 1.521-529; *Archiv für das Studium der neuer. Sprachen u. Literaturen*, xxix Jahrf., 53 Bd., p. 32.

Bet, as the wynd it bleu, then wreche amydde the eie.  
 The wawes bete ek of the se bi uore & bihynde;  
 Wrecchedore gost then he was ne dorte nomon fynde.  
 S. brendan him bad agodes name to telle him wat he were.  
 & wat he hadde god mysdo, & wat hi dude there.

This "wretched ghost" was Judas Iscariot who, through the divine mercy, on Sundays and the other holy days of the year, enjoyed a mitigation which seemed happiness and repose in comparison with his ordinary sufferings in the pit of hell. It was part of the "theology of sentiment," in the Middle Ages, as distinct from the idea of an irrevocable damnation, to believe that the greatest of sinners and the one least worthy of pardon or pity enjoyed a respite from the intensity of his sufferings, because of some small fragments of goodness which he had done in his lifetime.<sup>121</sup> The stone whereon he sat, he once had placed in a muddy path for the ease of them who went that way; wherefore it easeth him now. The cloth which dulled the cut of the waves, yet lashed him in the eyes and face, he once had given to a leper, but it was bought with money that he stole from our Lord's purse, wherefore now it galls him more than it soothes. The iron forks, (or, according to some versions, the two oxtongues), which hung before him, he once had given to the priests of the Temple, whereon to hang pots, and, since they were bought with his own money, they are a comfort to him now, for the fishes gnaw on them and spare him. "Now," quoting from the Latin version, "when the vesper hour had covered the face of Thetis, the devils came to hale their fellow, Judas, to the master, the great devil, but, to their great chagrin, his torments were stayed for that night through the intercession of the blessed Brendan." In a fifteenth century German chap book on St. Brendan, Judas is made to say: "Had I had real rue, so would God have shown me His great grace and mercy, even though I had sold Him," and, in our own day, the French symbolist Paul Verlaine has maintained that Judas's punishment was because he had despaired: "Judas is damned," he says, "but not for having betrayed Christ; no, not for that. He is damned for having hanged himself in despair, for having doubted the infinite mercy of God."

<sup>121</sup> *Romania*, xviii, 1889, p. 636.

The meeting of Brendan and Judas is not described in the Lismore version, but it is found in other Irish manuscripts.<sup>122</sup> The lament of Judas on his sin, addressed to Brendan, is very powerful and poetic in the Old Irish:

Mairc dorighne maircc dogni. maircc a thurus for bith cé.  
Intí doní saint tarró. Maircc fa dó 7 maircc, a dhé.

Uch, a Brenainn, fégaídh me. cech a ndénaim damh is mo  
Ifern dona daer dubh dall. uch as ann atú sa béo.

Woe to him that hath done this. Alas for him that does it.  
Sad his journey in this world; the covetous man is joyless.

Ah, O Brendan, look at me. All I do brings me more pain.  
Dire hell, hateful, black, and blind: Alas, 'tis there I am living.

In the Tuscan prose version<sup>123</sup> there is a curious passage in which Judas gives the reasons why he betrayed Christ. From the Brendan legend, the Judas episode passed into Gautier de Metz's *Image du Monde* and into a poem of Baudouin de Sebourg; it is also found in a story of Huon of Bordeaux<sup>124</sup> which tells how, during a storm at sea, he perceived a man swimming in the midst of the waters. It was Judas, and his only protection from the fury of the wind and waves was a small piece of cloth which, while on earth, he had bestowed in charity. The meeting with Judas is described in greatest detail in the Latin *Vita Secunda*<sup>125</sup> and in the Norman-French poem, both of which contain passages which are not unworthy of being placed alongside the *Divina Commedia*. In fact, in his conception of the punishment inflicted upon Judas and because of the pity and commiseration which he feels for him, the unknown writer has produced something infinitely more tender and poetic than the picture which the great Florentine has left of him, with his head munched by Satan and kicking his legs in the air:

"Quell' anima lassù, c' ha maggior pena,"  
Disse 'l Maestro, "è Giuda Scariotto,  
Che 'l capo ha dentro, e fuor le gambe mena"

<sup>122</sup> Brussels, 5100-5104; Fermoy fo. 58a.

<sup>123</sup> VILLARI, *o. c.*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>124</sup> DUNLOP, *History of Prose Fiction*, London, 1896, I, p. 128.

<sup>125</sup> PLUMMER, *o. c.*, II, 286-287.

“That soul up there which has the greater pain  
Judas Iscariot is,” my guide averred.

“With head inside and legs that outside strain.”<sup>127</sup>

Thence the voyagers sail south “glorifying God in all things,” and on the third day they reach a small round island difficult of access, wherein they converse with Paul the Hermit, whose snow white hair covered him like a garment. He informs the godly sailors that they are near their journey’s end, even “Dat lant der gelofften der heiligen,” the “Terra Repromissionis Sanctorum.” The Irish life of Brendan breaks off abruptly without giving any idea of the appearance of the earthly Paradise. A later scribe has tried to make good the defect by appending a long portion of a description of heaven as seen in a vision by another Irishman, Adamnan, but the addition has nothing whatsoever to do with the voyage of St. Brendan. Indeed, in all the versions the Land of Promise is described with a sobriety which appears excessive when we remember that this is the scope of the voyage and consider the prolixity with which things of much less account are narrated.

When the days of their pilgrimage on the ocean were over, the seafarers reached home in Ireland where the news of their arrival spread rapidly. Their relatives rejoiced at their safe return and gave thanks to God:

La nuvele va par païs  
Que venuz est de paraïs.  
Ne sunt haitet sul li parent,  
Ainz sunt tres tuz comunement.<sup>128</sup>

We may be sure that Brendan and his companions often sailed their voyage over in the gardens and halls of the cloister, —“qui navigant mare, enarrant pericula ejus”—and thus their adventures became hardly less edifying to the brothers who had remained at home than to be intrepid sailors themselves. One winter day as the man of God was strolling with the brothers, a storm of snow and hail came upon them, so that they could scarcely walk. The snow completely covered the ground. And the brothers said to one another, “Could the punishment in hell be worse than this cold?” Brendan, hearing their question,

<sup>127</sup> *Inferno*, xxxiv, 61–63. Sidney Gunn’s translation.

<sup>128</sup> Anglo-Norman poem, lines 1816–1820.

answered: "Listen, brothers, to what I tell you. One day on my voyages we heard a great groaning and wailing in the sea, so that the spirit of each of us shuddered. And we sailed to a place nearby to learn the cause of the weeping. And behold we saw the mouth of the sea opened, and therein we espied a solitary rock, whereon sat that sad and piteous voice. For the sea swept over the rock from every side, and from the east it dashed waves of fire, and from the west waves of ice and of intolerable cold. And thus was verified the word of God, 'Let him pass from the snow waters to excessive heat, and his sin even to hell.'"

All the copies of the story conclude with a pious prayer for intercession. In the Old Venetian it runs in this wise: "May Brendan, in his holiness, pray God for me too, and may God give me grace to make good end of soul and of body. And also may he pray God for all who read this, his legend, and for those who hear willingly his story, to the honor of God and of him who was a good man, a saintly and upright monk from his boyhood to the day of his death. Deo Gratias. Amen."

Various attempts have been made to interpret the St. Brendan legend. It is, of course, out of the question to accept one extreme view of it and to regard it as a true narrative in every particular. Nor is the other extreme view any more likely to be correct, which is, to look upon the story as nothing but a hermit's dream, a pious romance or mystical allegory intended to represent the cloistral life, or a monk's progress from one ideal monastery to another. The tradition according to which St. Brendan became a celebrated sailor and discoverer who made a seven years' voyage in search of the Land of Promise must be based on some kernel of truth, which, however, has long since been obscured by the workings of the Celtic imagination. The very instincts that are most characteristic of the race among whom the legend arose, as disclosed in the literature of the pagan Irish—a profound religiosity, a desire to penetrate the unknown and to make the unseen world actual, a thirst for an ideal, a craving after new adventures and extravagant wonders—all prevail to a high degree in the voyage of St. Brendan. Superimposed on those typically Celtic qualities, are these virtues which are chiefly due to Christian influence—patience and charity, a feeling for humanity, equality



and democracy—Brendan addresses his brothers lovingly as “*commilitones mei*” and “*combellatores*,” “fellow warriors, soldiers, comrades”—a feeling of nothingness and helplessness in the face of the grandeur of creation and an utter faith in the power and goodness of God to avert all perils. There is also something particularly attractive about these sailor-monks who not only could fast and pray, but could sail a ship with some of the spirit of the buccaneers.

Ernest Renan has written a charming page à propos of the voyage of St. Brendan and the singular combination of Celtic naturalism and Christian spiritualism from which it sprang: “What more delightful dream than that Land of Promise where reigns perpetual day. There, all the plants bear flowers, all the trees bear fruits. Only a few privileged men have visited it, and, on their return, they are known by the fragrance which their garments keep for forty days. In the midst of these dreams appears with surprising truth the sensation of polar voyages picturesque with the transparence of the sea, vistas of ice islands melting in the sun, volcanic phenomena of Iceland, the sporting of whales and the characteristic appearances of the fiords of Norway; the sudden fogs and the sea as calm as milk; green islands crowned with verdure descending to the waves. This fantastic nature, created expressly for another humanity, this strange topography, dazzling with fiction and speaking with reality, make the poem of St. Brendan one of the most astonishing creations of the human mind and, perhaps, the most complete expression of the Celtic ideal.”<sup>129</sup>

Despite the profound study which has been given to the subject, considerable obscurity still remains as to the source of the episodes which have been employed to construct the mosaic-like story of the Voyage of St. Brendan: old Irish myths, reports of earlier sea voyages, Christian legends of Irish missionaries, and perhaps even the Orient, have probably all contributed material, though in different degree. Some of the episodes appear strikingly like reminiscences of classical literature, the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, for example, with which the early Irish were familiar.

Navigation and shipbuilding had reached a high stage of development even among the ancient Celts. In the short cam-

<sup>129</sup> *Essais de Morale et de Critique*, 4 ed., 1889, p. 445.

paign which he carried on in Britain, Julius Caesar obtained ideas of naval construction from the native ships which he turned to advantage the following year, in his sea fight with the Celtic Veneti in the Bay of Biscay. Though the Romans were successful in that engagement, the naval equipment of the Celts was superior and there may have been some Irish ships in the fleet of the Veneti.<sup>130</sup> There is no reason to believe that Irish sailors were not at least as daring and enterprising as the mariners of other lands. Tacitus, writing in the first century after Christ, says that the harbors of Ireland were better known on the continent than were the harbors of Britain. In the fourth and fifth centuries of our era, the Irish carried on a flourishing commerce with southern and western Gaul, not via Britain, but directly, bringing back, among other commodities, wine in exchange for the products of their own country. They are known to have been north of the Clyde in the fifth century A. D., where they fought the Picts, the British and the Angles; that they were on the west coast of Wales and Cornwall in the same century is testified to by inscriptions of Irish origin which are found there. It is stated in the mythical history of Ireland that King Mogh Corb, son of Cormac Cas, in the third century, A. D. went, "with a manning of 300 ships," to invade Scandinavia.<sup>131</sup> Later, however, in the ninth and following centuries, when the Irish came into contact with the Northmen, who were above all a seagoing people, these Vikings controlled the seaport towns which they established in Ireland and gathered into their hands all Irish commerce. A mark of their influence is seen in the fact that most of the words for large ships and parts of a ship in Irish are of Scandinavian origin. In ancient Irish saga tales, such as *Echtra Connla*, "The Adventures of Connla," appear boats of glass in which fairy women came to earth, or copper boats, as in the tale known as *Serglige Conculaind*, "The Sick Bed of Cuchulainn," or such a crystal boat as Merlin sailed in in search of the blessed islands. There is mention also of a self-moving boat which led through a blinding mist to Manannan's marvelous island. But the Irish had also safer and more businesslike ships, provided with sails, ropes and tackle and everything needed to steer and

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<sup>130</sup> *De Bello Civili*, I, liiii.

<sup>131</sup> KEATING, *History of Ireland*, ed. DINNEEN, II, 354-356.

manage the vessel. Adamnan mentions no less than nine kinds of ships as in use among the Irish of his day (seventh–eighth century), of which the “*navis longa*” and “*navis oneraria*,” cargo ships, must have been capable of going on extensive voyages. But the boats to which the Irish mariner monks trusted themselves on the sea were very light, their sides and bindings being of osiers fixed to some solid pieces of wood and overlaid with hides and smeared with oil and gum. They were small enough to be drawn overland, when necessary, and brought down again to the sea when it was time to leave. Boats of this kind are called *curach*, in Irish, and they are not quite extinct on the west coast of Ireland.<sup>132</sup> They are described, in ancient times, for example, by Caesar,<sup>133</sup> Lucan,<sup>134</sup> Pliny,<sup>135</sup> Avienus,<sup>136</sup> and Solinus.<sup>137</sup> Lucan speaks of the Britons navigating the ocean in their boats of osier: “. . . the bending willow into barks they twine, then line the work with skins of slaughtered kine.”<sup>138</sup> Sidonius Apollinaris<sup>139</sup> describes the British boatman,

. . . . Cui pelle salum sulcare Britannum  
Ludus et assuto glaucum mare findere lembo.

and Avienus tells how “They sew skins to skins and plow the pathless seas in furthest parts with keels of leather.” Finally, Auguste Brizeux, the poet of *Les Bretons*, describes the Irish sailor-monks:

Dans leurs barques d’osier recouvertes de peau  
Ils voguaient, engourdis par les vagues glacées  
Et les côtes partout de neiges hérissées.<sup>140</sup>

In the Irish Book of Lismore is a poem in four quatrains, by an unknown poet, which describes Brendan’s boat and crew, the company which he took with him and the number of ships in which they sailed. It begins, “Trí longa seolais in saoi”:<sup>141</sup>

Three vessels the sage sailed  
Over the wave-voice of the very wet sea;

<sup>132</sup> REEVES’ *Adamnan*, p. 170, note k.

<sup>133</sup> *De Bello Civili*, i, liiii.

<sup>134</sup> *Pharsalia*, iv, 130–135.

<sup>135</sup> *Hist. Natural.*, vii, c. 57

<sup>136</sup> *Ora Marit.*, v, 101–107.

<sup>137</sup> *Polyhistor.*, c. 22.

<sup>138</sup> *Pharsalia*, iv, 136.

<sup>139</sup> *Carmen* i, 1.370–371.

<sup>140</sup> *Les Bretons*, chant III, p. 31.

<sup>141</sup> *Lismore Lives*, p. 106.

Thirty men in each vessel he had.  
Over the storm of the crested sea.

When he returned home from his first cruise his foster mother counseled him to sail again, but this time in a wooden ship. He then built in Connaught "a great marvelous vessel," which held all his household, his wrights and smiths, his plants and seeds, and everything that was needed for the voyage.

Brendan was not the only Irish monk who filled his sails with adventurous winds and embarked on a monastic journey. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*,<sup>142</sup> under the year 891, tells of three Irishmen named Dubslane, Macbeth, and Maelinmuin, who set out to visit King Ælfred: "And they came in a boat without oars, from Ireland, whence they had stolen away; because for the love of God they desired to be on pilgrimage, they recked not whither. The boat in which they sailed was made of two hides and a half; and they took with them provisions for seven nights. And on the seventh night they came on shore in Cornwall and fared at once to King Ælfred." In Manus O'Donnell's *Betha Coluim Chille*, "Life of Columcille,"<sup>143</sup> is related an adventure of Columcille with Mongan mac Fiachna, son of the king of Ulster, who came to match skill and knowledge with him and who declared that he had knowledge of many of the countries and islands and the hidden isles of the world. "In especial know I the thrice fifty islands that are westward from Erin in the sea. And thrice the measure of Erin is each of these islands." "And who is it dwelleth in those lands and districts whereby until today we have had no tidings?" saith Columcille. "There dwell therein," saith Mongan mac Fiachna, "worshipful folk of fair shape and form, both men and women, and there be bright cows with red ears there that have with them calves of like hue. And there be white sheep, exceeding many. These be the cattle and gear they have."<sup>144</sup> Columcille himself was a good sailor. On a time that he was traveling the sea by the coast of Alba, a great wind arose so that the ship was in great danger of sinking. And through humility Columcille bailed the bilge-water out

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<sup>142</sup> Edit. Thorpe, ii, 69, Master of the Rolls Collection.

<sup>143</sup> Pp. 78-81.

<sup>144</sup> O'KELLEHER and SCHOEPPERLE, *Life of Columcille*, p. 78.

of the ship.<sup>145</sup> Many if not most of these sea tales grew out of the practice of Irish monks of seeking a solitary place of meditation, penance and prayer, in the deserts of the ocean. During the course of the sixth century there arose in the seacoast dwellers of Ireland the same desire to go forth and become hermits and missionaries which, in the preceding century, had won for their countrymen the reputation for wandering which they enjoyed during the early Middle Ages. Possibly another reason why the Irish sought retirement on distant islands was because Roman ecclesiastical customs were beginning to spread all over Ireland. At the close of the Synod of Whitby, held in 664, when the king of Northumbria decided in favor of the institutions of Saint Peter as against the Irish practices of St. Columcille, several conformed to the practice of their opponents, the others retired in silent discontent to Iona.<sup>146</sup> Later, with the spread of the new regulations, the stubborn Irish monks were obliged to retreat into the very ocean. This yearning for a place of utter retirement from the world became with the Irish a passion. It is constantly referred to in the lives of Irish saints and has left its impression on the topography of the country in the Latin word *desertum*, which, though disguised in Anglo-Irish writings under a variety of spellings, most frequently occurs as Dysart or Dysert. Such was the ascetic ardor of these Irish anchorites, as almost to outdo the hermits of the sandy deserts of Syria and Egypt. Yet deserts of sand still attached them to earth, from which, if they could, they would escape entirely. So they sought for a desert in the ocean: "Eremum in oceano quaerere," and "Pro Christo peregrinare votens, enavigavit," are constantly recurring expressions. Gradually their island cloisters studded the coast of Ireland, "insulas veluti monilia," "like a necklace,"<sup>147</sup> and the circle widened until finally, in the latter part of the fourth century,<sup>148</sup> there was hardly a spray-swept isle off the coast that was not occupied by a small community or by an Irish anchorite, and the more inaccessible and further their retreats were removed from the mainland, the more saintly were held to be those who

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>146</sup> LINGARD, *The History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 2d edit., vol. i, ch. 1.

<sup>147</sup> AMBROSE, *Hexam.*, iii, c. 5.

<sup>148</sup> BURY, *Life of St. Patrick*, pp. 294-295.

dwelt in them. Many of these adventurers must have lost their lives which they had entrusted to cockle shells of wattled twigs, and, as no tidings were ever heard of them, the belief could easily have arisen that they had reached the far off shores of the Land of the Blessed, from which there was no return. In a litany in the Book of Leinster,<sup>149</sup> and the Speckled Book,<sup>150</sup> is mention of an "anchorite whom Brendan met in the Land of Promise, with all the saints that had perished in the dark islands of the ocean." Those whom they had left at home in the ease and peace of the cloister dreamed of the terrible adventures, which, they supposed, had befallen their fellows. These dreams they told for mere amusement or for edification; other tales were highly colored yarns, purporting to be accounts of their adventures in search of the Land of Promise, spun by the adventurers themselves who were fortunate enough to return to their native land. In Adamnan's *Life of St. Columcille* is mention of a certain Baitan, who was Columcille's first successor in the monastery of Iona, and who, along with others, sought a desert "in pelago intransmeabili."<sup>151</sup> About the same time, St. Cormac ua Liathain sailed to northern seas for the same purpose. He made at least three voyages and became known as Cormac Leir, "Cormac of the Sea,"<sup>152</sup> "qui tribus non minus uicibus eremum in oceano laboriose quesivit, nec tamen inuenit." Similar tales are connected with St. Ailbe (Albaeus), of Emly, who lived at the close of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century, and his "family."<sup>153</sup> It is related of him that he had planned to sail to Ultima Thuli, but being dissuaded by the King of Cashel to undertake the voyage alone, he agreed to send twenty-four of the brethren in his stead. On his own journey, Brendan came upon the monastic family of Ailbe on an island which has many of the characteristics of the Land of Promise, though it is not identical with it. Punishment was sometimes inflicted by setting the guilty person adrift in a light skiff or wicker boat with one paddle, or in a leathern box without any paddle at all,

<sup>149</sup> *Book of Leinster*, p. 373, col. 4.

<sup>150</sup> *Leabhar Breac*, "The Speckled Book," p. 23, col. 2, l. 43.

<sup>151</sup> ADAMNAN, ii, 14; *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, viii, 1883, p. 704.

<sup>152</sup> ADAMNAN, i, 6; ii, 42; iii, 17; WAHLUND, *o. c.*, xxii.

<sup>153</sup> COLGAN, *Acta Sanctorum*, p. 241.

with a vessel of meal and water and sometimes with a club for keeping off the beasts of the sea. Many even imposed such an ordeal upon themselves as a penance. This punishment of setting adrift is described in detail by Muirchu<sup>154</sup> and is referred to in the *Ancient Laws of Ireland*<sup>155</sup>: the criminal "must go unarmed to the shore, having nothing but a small and vile garment. He must bind his feet with an iron fetter and fling the fetter-key into the sea. He must then enter a 'navis unius pellis,' a coracle whose wicker framework was covered with hide only one fold deep, and, without food, sail, or rudder, commit himself to the mercy of the elements."

Besides the love of wandering, which was a peculiar ascetic trait of the early Irish Church, the mysterious attraction which the sea has always exercised on the minds of the Celts was a powerful impulse in driving many of the holy men of Ireland to the islands of mid-ocean. This attraction was reinforced by a lingering belief which they held in the existence of a delectable island beyond the waves, where the setting sun sinks in the western regions, and by the belief of the learned Fergil the Geometer, and possibly of other early Irish scholars, in the existence of men at the antipodes. This belief in a Great Land in the west was originally essentially pagan, and, even as such, vestiges of it still haunt the imagination of the longshore folk of Brittany and the west of Ireland. Such a belief in a happy other world is found, of course, among other peoples besides the Celts, but, with the latter, the spirit that pervades it is peculiarly Celtic. This pagan Elysium of the "Sidh" ("fairy") dwellers, the Irish called, and still call, *Tír na n-óg*, "the land of the (ever) young," *Tír na mbeó* "the land of the living," *Tír na mban*, or *Tír na nIngen*, "the land of women," *Mag Mór*, *Mag Mell*, *Trag Mór*, "the great plain," "the plain of delight," "the great strand," and by other names. The joys of this "Isle Delightsome," or "Lond of Biheste," were anything but spiritual. It remained for Christianity to add the spiritual element, and it is the incomplete amalgamation of Elysium and Eden which has produced the Irish conception of *Tír Tairngire*, "the Land of Promise," sought by Brendan.

<sup>154</sup> *Tripartite Life*, ii, 222, 228, clxxiv; O'KELLEHER and SCHOEPPERLE, *Life of Columcille*, p. xviii, note.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. *Chronicon Scotorum*, 622; *Cáin Adamnáin*, ed. Kuno Meyer, p. 43.

Men thought it a region of sunshine and rest,  
And they called it Hy-Brasil, the isle of the blest.<sup>156</sup>

The garments of those who had spent but a few hours in that Promised Land bore the sweet scent of its fragrance for forty days. In the Dutch "Brendan" the returned voyagers ask: "En kendi niet den roeke van onsen clederen dat wi in dat paradijs hebben geweest,"<sup>157</sup> "And know ye not from the fragrance of our garments that we have been in paradise?"

Thus one reason for the great popularity which the Voyage of St. Brendan enjoyed was that it had its roots in an older popular tradition. Another was that, unlike most of the other sea voyages, it had the good fortune to be written in Latin as well as in Irish. It thus came within the ken of western Europe and became a part of the world's literature. Moreover, it was pervaded by a strong mysticism, a peculiar sense of magic, a terrible yet graceful supernaturalism, a vivid love of natural beauty, and by luxuriousness of detail and color. Still another reason was that it combined the marvelous with the edifying and satisfied a natural desire to read of voyages even though one is not able to take part in them. The Irish imagination always ran riot in the oversea voyage literature; nay, the marvelous voyages of the Argo and of Ulysses are reasonable and possible when compared with those of the Irish. And what legends took rise among them! Legends of saints who put to sea in cockle shells and even in *stone* troughs, in which they were wafted without oar or rudder from Ireland to Wales or from Wales to Brittany. And what stronger proof of the reality of those voyages could we demand than the very stone troughs themselves which are still to be seen in Brittany and in which fond mothers place their babes as a cure for many of the ills that flesh is heir to!

When in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Irish historians and encyclopedists gathered into great collections the disjecta membra of the old tradition, they quite arbitrarily classified them according to subject under several heads. The tales of the oversea type they divided into two classes, to which they gave the technical names "Longes" and "Immram." By "Longes," an abstract built on the Irish word *long* (Latin *navis longa*),

<sup>156</sup> Gerald Griffin.

<sup>157</sup> MOLTZER, *Leven*.



"a ship," they meant a voyage entered upon involuntarily or a banishment over the sea. In later times the word was used to mean any banishment, not only by sea or abroad but even from one Irish district to another. The most famous example of the class is *Longes mac nUsnig*, "The Exile of the Children of Usnech." The word "Immram" (pl. Immramha) had a wider scope. Its primary meaning was "a sailing round" or "circumnavigation," but it came to import a voyage of discovery or adventure, or any freely undertaken sea voyage wherein the description of the incidents is the leading motive. The Voyage of Brendan is also called, in Latin, *Navigatio* and *Peregrinatio*, and *Muridecht Brenainn*, in Irish. These tales of the sea seem to have developed between the middle of the seventh and end of the ninth century. Though there must have been many such, only seven are catalogued in the Book of Leinster,<sup>158</sup> and, of these, only three are known to exist, to which must be added the Voyage of Snedgus and Mac Riagla, which is not mentioned in the catalogue. The "Immramha" may be divided into what, for the sake of convenience, may be called, the one, a pagan, and the other a Christian, group, though in all of them there is a curious overlapping of ecclesiastical and secular elements. In general, the pagan framework has been preserved in the Christian "immramha," and it is only in spirit and influence that the two classes differ. The chief representative of the Christian class is the Voyage of Brendan. To this class belongs also the Voyage of the hÚi Corra, which in some of its parts is one of the earliest of the "Immramha." From the events narrated, it would appear to belong to the middle of the sixth century of our era, though the manuscripts in which it has been preserved are much later. The Voyage of Snedgus and Mac Riagla, like the Brendan story, bears a strong ecclesiastical stamp. It is a poetic description of a voyage of some Irish clerics who were driven by a tempest northwestward to the Shetlands. The piece was probably written originally in verse, which was afterwards replaced by a prose version which appears to belong to the end of the eleventh century. There are, besides, many smaller tales or mere episodes having the character of this group, such as the story of the

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<sup>158</sup> *Book of Leinster*, 189c, l.29 fl.

Three Young Clerics and their Cat, the navigation of two Monks of the Order of St. Columba, who had been driven into northern seas and saw strange marvels there,<sup>159</sup> the Voyage or Exile of Breccan, who was shipwrecked off the Irish coast, famous in the literature and legends of Wales. Breccan had fifty boats trading between Ireland and Scotland, and on one of his voyages he was swallowed up in the great whirlpool. His fate was not known until, many years after, Lugaid, the blind poet, came to Bangor. The poet's attendants strayed from the town down to the strand, where they found the bleached skull of a small dog on the beach. They brought it to Lugaid and asked him whose it was. The poet commanded them to put the end of his poet's wand upon the skull, and then he told them that the skull was that of Breccan's little dog, and that Breccan himself with all his ships and people had been drowned in the whirlpool which ever since is known as "Breccan's Cauldron." Of the "Immramha" which are pronouncedly secular, the most remarkable are *Immram Brain maic Febail*, "The Voyage of Bran to the Land of the Living," which, partly by reason of the name of its hero, may have had considerable influence on the development of the Brendan legend—in fact, there are almost identical episodes in both stories—and *Immram Mael Duin*, "The Voyage of Maelduin," which has always been regarded as the type of this class of mythic literature, since it is both the oldest and shows no signs of Christian influence. Its composition probably antedates the raids of the Vikings in Ireland. Both the Maelduin and the Brendan story have so many points in common that the latter would appear to be nothing but the Christian adaptation of the former, or at least to have had its principle source in it.

Thus, in these and other pagan "Immramha," the author of the Voyage of Brendan had a framework ready at hand and elastic enough to allow the inclusion of all sorts of adventures, but it would be difficult to account for his choice of Brendan as his hero, unless the legend was founded on some basis of fact. In the earlier versions of the saga, Brendan set out in search of a place of retirement amid the waves of the ocean. In the later conception of the event, he engaged in a seven years' voyage to

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<sup>159</sup> TODD'S *Analysis of the Book of Fermoy*, p. 28.

discover the Earthly Paradise, and it is on the strength of this that he has chiefly acquired his reputation of a navigator. The former idea must have had an historical basis: it was only one of a large number of cases of which there can be no uncertainty. Whatever doubt remains concerns only Brendan's reputed voyage to the Land of Promise. He had been preceded in his quest, as we have seen, by his master Barintus, and by Mernoc, and in turn Brendan's example was followed by his favorite disciple, Machutus. This youth, who is also known as Maclovius, or in modern times as Malo, was born between 510 and 520 in Monmouthshire, and, consequently, was a Welshman but, according to Joannes a Bosco he was an Irishman, and according to Sigebert of Gembloux, a Breton. The story of his life is nearly as remarkable as that of his master. He became a disciple of Brendan at Llancarvan, in his native county, and is credited with having been one of the sailor-monks who sailed under the great Irish navigator. In the course of the development of the legend of St. Malo, the rôles of master and disciple have become inverted and in some versions the pupil seems to have usurped the place of his superior and got his celebrity, it would seem, at the expense of St. Brendan. St. Malo also was the hero of a strange Sindbad-like adventure on a whale's back and he is said to have been persecuted by the wicked Britons who, owing to a curse which he had laid upon them, suffered various reverses in battle. Saint Brendan intervened in the quarrel. In the following lines Johannes de Garlandia describes the punishment which Brendan inflicted upon the Britons for having ill-treated his disciple:

Fracta pace Deus irascitur: Edocet illud  
 Prælustri sancto Scotia clara viro.  
 Brandanus Eusebio maledixit teste Britannos:  
 Iccirco flebant multa pericla pati.  
 Trans mare se misit et eos prece solvit eorum;  
 Et peregre licuit ire venire viro  
 Frangentes igitur pacem maledictio franget;  
 Gratia nec fractos quæ reparabit erit.<sup>160</sup>

Sufficient instances have perhaps been adduced to show that the early medieval Irish were daring and enterprising sailors,

<sup>160</sup> USSHER, *Works*, vi, p. 51-52.

and, what is more, it is now generally held by geographers that it was Irish sailor-monks who effected the earliest voyages northward to the Arctic Circle, of which there is literary mention. The celebrated Irish geographer Dicuil has never been charged with being a fantastic writer. About the year 825 he wrote his famous work *Liber de mensura orbis terrae*, in which we find the following statement: "A certain priest who is worthy of credence has told me that, after a sail of two summer days and one night in a small ship with two thwarts, he landed on one of the islands (Shetlands). There is also another group of small islands (Faroes) divided from one another by narrow sounds, in which for about one hundred years (i. e. from 725 to 825) dwelt hermits from our Ireland. But as from the beginning of the world these islands were always deserted, so now, because of the destruction by the Northmen, there are no anchorites on them, but they are occupied by great flocks of sheep and a great variety of sea birds." Dicuil's statement is confirmed by Icelandic sources, and there is an interesting bit of Irish testimony to the same effect, going back two and a half centuries earlier. In the year 565 St. Columcille happened to be at the court of Brudeus, the converted king of the Picts of Scotland, and, the chief of the Orkneys being present, he told the king that some of his clergy had lately emigrated in the hope of finding a desolate country "in the impenetrable ocean," and he asked Brudeus to recommend those monks to the chief of the Orkneys so that he might take them under his protection.

It is now known positively that Irish anchorites were in the Orkneys as early as the year 579 and that they were driven out of the Shetlands in 620. It is also recorded that, about the year 670, some of them came to the Faroes; nor were they necessarily the first comers, but they may have been going to kinsmen who had settled there we know not how much earlier. But the tranquillity which they sought in those northern regions was of short duration: neither the rigorous climate nor the dull skies could save them from the incursions of the robbers of the sea, which, beginning in 725, finally in 795, drove the Irish settlers to an uninhabited island in the sea of ice which we now know as Iceland. In the year 861, even this place of refuge was discovered by the Northmen. It so happened that a Norwegian

pirate named Nadoddr, while sailing toward the Faroes, was surprised by a storm and driven within sight of a strange land covered with snow.<sup>161</sup> He went ashore, climbed to a tall mountain, looked for a sign of habitation, and returned to Norway, praising the verdure and climate of the land he had visited and which he named Snaeland "Snowland." Nearly a century elapsed and, during the political troubles in the reign of Haraldr Hárfargi "Harald the Hairy" (860-930), the first king of Norway, many Norwegian refugees sailed over to Iceland and forthwith proceeded to inflict upon the Irish settlers there even worse cruelty and oppression than they themselves were fleeing from in Norway. Most of the Irish were slaughtered. Of those who escaped, some no doubt were lost at sea; others found their way back to Ireland, and still others, perchance, reached Greenland and even the shores of the Western Continent. The Book of Leinster<sup>162</sup> and the Martyrology of Donegal<sup>163</sup> mention the massacre of Donnan, abbot of the island of Eig (Egg), slain as he said Mass, and of his fifty companions, whose names are given. It remained, however, for a descendant of those Norwegian invaders, namely, Ari Thorgilsson, the father of Icelandic history, surnamed Fróde "the Learned" (1067-1148), to atone for the wrongs which his forefathers inflicted upon the unfortunate Irish colony, by handing down to posterity the most precious account we possess of the presence of the first Irish navigators in Iceland. In his *Islendíngabók*, and similarly in the Prologue to *Landnáma*, he says, speaking of Iceland at the time the Norwegians reached it: "Thâ voru hêr menn kristner, their er Northmenn kalla papa, en their fôru síthan a braut, af thvî at their vildu eigi vesa hêr vith heithna menn, ok lētu eptir boekr Írskar ok bjöllur ok baglar. Af thvî mátti skilja at their voru menn Irskir." Christian men were there whom the Northmen call Papae, 'priests,' and they left the place because they did not wish to remain there with pagans, and they left behind them Irish books, bells and croziers, from which one may conclude that they were Irishmen." We are not to conclude from this, however, that all the Irish Icelanders

<sup>161</sup> *Islands Landnámabók*, pt. I, ch. I, p. 5-6.

<sup>162</sup> *Book of Leinster*, 359a.

<sup>163</sup> April 17.

were clerics. According to the *Breve Chronicon Norvegiae*,<sup>164</sup> "Papae vero propter albas vestes, quibus ut clerici induebantur, vocati sunt, unde in teutonica lingua omnes clerici Papae dicuntur," "They are called Papae because they wore white clothes and dressed like priests, wherefore in the Teutonic tongue all priests are called 'Papae.'" This word, which may be simply the Latin word *papa* or from the ecclesiastical use of *papa*, "master," has left its mark to this day on several of the islands in the Shetlands group and thereabouts. The Norwegians also called the Irish Icelanders "Westmen," "men come by sea from the west," that is, from Ireland, which, to the Norwegians, was a western land.

This article is not intended, nor is the present writer competent, to treat, with the fullness it deserves, of the thorniest question which still awaits solution in the intricate St. Brendan problem, if indeed the question can ever be decided without peradventure, namely, the discovery of America by Irish seamen. The literature on the subject is almost without limit and most of it has been printed. This material, however, both published and unpublished, must all be thoroughly sifted again with the closest scrutiny, and new light thrown on the subject from untried angles and with the aid of all the resources of Celtic and Scandinavian philology, geography and the allied sciences. Here it will be sufficient to state briefly a few phases of the problem and to refer to some of the greatest authorities for a more detailed discussion of the subject.

Most of our information concerning the early voyages of the Irish we owe to Icelandic historians, who have never been accused of drawing overmuch on their imagination or of lacking in a good memory, sobriety, and veracity. The twelfth century Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus,<sup>165</sup> speaking of them, could truthfully say, "Indeed, they count it a delight to learn and to consign to remembrance the history of all nations, deeming it as great a glory to set forth the excellence of others as well as to display

<sup>164</sup> In *Monumenta historica Norvegiae*, pp. 89, 208. L. Duvau, in *Journal des Savants*, 1899, pp. 697 ff.

<sup>165</sup> *Saxonis Grammatici historia danica*, recens. Müller, Copenhagen, 1839, I, pp. 7-8.

their own." There are three Scandinavian documents which are supposed to refer to Irish settlements in America. In the *Landnámabók*, Ari Thorgilsson, referred to above, tells how his great-grandfather, Ari Marsson, a powerful Icelandic chief, who lived toward the end of the tenth century and was descended from Carroll (Irish *Cearbhal*, Icelandic *Kiarvalr*), king in Dublin, and some other Icelandic adventurers were blown by a storm upon Hvíttramannaland, "White Men's Land" (that is, men of white (not red) skin, or because they dressed in white), by some called Írland it Mikla, "Great Ireland." That country, it has been proved, was situated toward the west, near the sea and near Vínland it Góðha, "Wineland the Good," six weeks' sail, as they said, from Ireland. Ari goes on to relate how his great-grandfather was hospitably received by the Christian settlers in "White Men's Land," was converted and became chief of the colony. This story was first told by a certain Hrafn Hlymreksfari, "Hrafn the Limerick trader," who was a contemporary of Ari Marsson and had lived for a long time in Limerick, Ireland, and had probably heard it from Irish or Icelandic sailors returned from "White Men's Land." Further, Ari Fróde records that his own uncle, Thorkell Gellison, remembered hearing Icelanders say that they had heard Thorfinn, Earl of the Orkneys (whose father Sigurd was killed at Clontarf, in 1014), tell about Ari Marsson, how he had been recognized in "White Men's Land" and settled down there. Now, this celebrated expedition of Ari Marsson must have taken place about the year 983, and Vínland, near which was "Great Ireland" or "White Men's Land," is generally regarded as corresponding roughly to the northern New England States and New Brunswick. It must be admitted, of course, that it does not necessarily follow from the mere fact that the new land was called "Great Ireland" that it had been discovered by the Irish; it is just as possible that it was so called merely because of some imagined resemblance to Ireland. It is interesting to note that an echo of the Scandinavian belief in the existence of "Great Ireland" was heard as far away as Sicily, whither the Normans had carried it with them and where, in the twelfth century, the Arabian geographer Edrisi translated the name of the country into Arabic as "Írlandah-al-Kabirah."

The next Icelandic text which is supposed to refer to pre-Columbian Irish in America is the *Eyrbyggja Saga*, which was composed after the year 1148. It tells how a certain Icelander, Gudhleif Gudhlaugsson, was sailing home from Ireland, whither he had gone on business, when his ship, being west of Ireland, was driven by a great northeast wind southwestwards, until finally it reached a great land where the people seemed to be speaking Irish. After spending some time among them, Gudhleif and his companions returned to Ireland where they passed the winter and then in the spring sailed home to Iceland. The third of these texts is the mythical saga of Thorfinn Karlsefni, also known as the Saga of Eiric the Red, who, while sailing from Vinland to Greenland, which he discovered in 986, was driven by a south wind to Markland (Newfoundland) which, he was told, faced "White Men's Land." Still another possible reference to Írland it Mikla may be seen in the famous work of the Venetian Zeno brothers, though the authenticity of the narrative has been disputed. They engaged in several voyages late in the fourteenth century and on their return they reported rumors of an island far in the west. They landed and met one of the inhabitants who spoke Latin, and from him they learned that the island was called Estotilanda, which may possibly point to "Great Ireland," Labrador, or to some other northern region on the east side of America, or may be merely an error for Escotilanda ("c" and "t" being often indistinguishable in medieval manuscripts) and refer to Ireland or Scotland. It is the "cold Estotiland," of which Milton wrote.<sup>166</sup>

Probably many more Icelandic mariners than those mentioned here were driven by violent winds on to the coast of "Great Ireland," but those are the only ones whose names have been preserved. In view of the frequent sailings off the west coast of Ireland, which is proved by numerous voyages that are recorded as having taken place during a century at least to and from the northern islands, it would be surprising if no Irish ship was blown out of its course in a storm and forced to cross the Atlantic. It need not be objected that such extensive voyages were not feasible in the simple vessels that were in use in those days. Some no doubt were shipwrecked, but that the feat was not impossible

<sup>166</sup> *Paradise Lost*, x, 686.



has been proved by authentic cases of boats no larger than those of the Irish drifting or in some way making the trans-Atlantic voyage. Furthermore, it is known positively that from the year 1003 to the year 1347 sailings between Iceland and Nova Scotia were not uncommon. While the Icelandic texts just quoted may prove nothing or may prove very much, this much is certain, that the Icelanders themselves believed that it was the Irish who first reached the western shores and first introduced Christianity into the New World. Nowhere do they ascribe to themselves the credit or glory of the discovery. Even had they been so disposed, one may conjecture that the claims of the Irish were too notorious to be disputed. And is it not inconsistent that, while nobody hesitates to take the candid word of the Scandinavians when they state that the Irish had preceded them to Iceland, their most positive statements that they had also gained the start of them in reaching America awaken suspicion? While, then, it has not yet been proved, to the entire satisfaction of all unbiased minds, that America was first discovered—and in part colonized—by Irish mariners, it would be unreasonable to reject *en bloc* all the evidence which has been advanced in favor of the reality of the Irish sea voyages, merely because there is so much of the marvelous in them. The early writers, unfortunately perhaps, were not so much concerned with placing on record historical events and geographical discoveries as with providing edifying or amusing stories, and it is precisely the fabulous elements that explain the preservation of these legends. While we ought not to be too positive about asserting or denying the truth of the events narrated, it is not too much to allow that there must have been some framework of fact on which was woven the web of adventure. The possibility, nay, the probability, of Irish forerunners of the Norsemen in America has been admitted by some of the most eminent modern geographers, Alexander von Humboldt, for example, whose opinion deserves to be quoted: "I do not at all share the contempt with which these national traditions have often been treated. On the contrary, I am firmly persuaded that with a little diligence the discovery of facts entirely unknown today will clear up many of these historic problems." It has also been admitted by such distinguished historians as Rafn, and Tarducci, and by the American authority who has made the most

exhaustive study of the question: "It seems likely," says Mr. Babcock, "that America was actually reached by the Irish even before the Norsemen and certainly long before all other Europeans;"<sup>167</sup> and again, "In view of what they (the Irish) really achieved, their known fearlessness and very special impulsion, why should it be incredible that in one thing more they should outstrip others, reaching at some point the mainland of America, though they might not be able to return, and their settlements must die out if reinforcements failed? If their supplanters in Iceland, the Norsemen, had not recorded the presence there of these ecclesiastical Irishmen, it is likely that we should still be debating it today, though it continued so long;"<sup>168</sup> and finally, "One must feel that Irish monks, blinded to everything beyond their absorbing purpose, may very well have been here before any Norsemen; but it seems at present beyond proving."<sup>169</sup>

It is to be feared that the case for the Irish discoverers has been discredited by the extravagant nature of some of the claims advanced in their favor by overzealous partisans. There have been many fantastic notions regarding the Celtic pre-Columbian discoveries of America. The height of absurdity was reached some fifty years ago by a French geographer who maintained that the Irish in America were descended from Brendan or from some one of the obscure Irish precursors of Christopher Columbus, and that there is a close likeness between the Irish language and the Algonquin and other Indian dialects. Some of these would-be philologists have indeed proved to their own satisfaction that the word Algonquin itself is of Irish origin! It will be sufficient merely to mention in passing some of the most fanciful statements which have been put forward in connection with this subject. From time to time we read in the newspapers of the discovery of Celtic remains in the New World. Wherever towers are found, as in Colorado and New Mexico, showing the slightest resemblance to the round towers of Ireland, or heaps of stones suggesting Irish beehive cells, the discoverers at once jump to the conclusion that they must be due to Irish builders. The letters of old navigators, like Cartier, Champlain, and Cortes, have been ransacked for

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<sup>167</sup> W. H. BABCOCK, in *The Glories of Ireland*, p. 37.

<sup>168</sup> Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, p. 27.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

the purpose, and any superficial analogies which they show to have existed between the rites and customs of the American and Mexican Indians and Christianity have been singularly exaggerated and attributed to the influence of Irish missionaries. The Indians, as is well known, had immemorial traditions of the presence of white men in the country before the coming of the Spaniards, and some of their tribes were taught that their ancestors crossed a great lake full of islands, very much as Irish sailors may have crossed the Atlantic by using the northern islands and Greenland as stepping stones. Some writers have held that the white Esquimaux are descendants of early Irish settlers! The civilization that existed in Mexico from the seventh century onward has been said to have been founded on the laws and customs of the ancient Irish, and some have even gone so far as to assert that Quetzalcohuatl, the more or less mythical Mexican hero-god or reformer, was one of these Irish legislators, or, who knows, perhaps even St. Brendan himself! But the Welsh were the greatest sinners, in the long yarns they spun of Indians speaking Welsh or Irish.<sup>170</sup> This was chiefly in the days when celtomania was rampant. For example, at the time of Sir Walter Raleigh, reports spread in England that the English colonists in Virginia were surprised to be saluted in Welsh by the redskins. Then there is the well-known case of the Rev. Morgan Jones, who was made prisoner in Virginia in 1669 by the Tuscaroras, who, he discovered, spoke a language resembling his own. Jones afterwards preached to the Indians and became their adviser in difficult matters. An almost identical story is told by Charles Beatty in his *Journal of Two Months' Tour* (1768), how a party of Carolina savages were about to scalp him, but they spared his life when he happened to exclaim a few words in Gaelic. Captain Stewart believed that he had come across Celtic books among the Natchitoches on the Red River,<sup>171</sup> and the Carolinians were said to possess a copy of the Bible in Irish. All these questions were for a long time a hotly controverted point of Welsh history. A few years ago a rusty knife blade, bearing the date 1257, and heavily incrustated with sulphur, was dug up

<sup>170</sup> *Dictionnaire des Sciences Naturelles*, t. xxi, p. 392; *Revue Encyclopédique*, No. 4, p. 162.

<sup>171</sup> HUMBOLDT, *Examen crit. de l'histoire de la Géogr. du nouv. Cont.*, 1837, ii, 144

from an Indian mound near Sulphur Springs, Ark. The finder, Mr. Thomas W. Barton, also claimed to have collected legends among the Creek Indians of the existence of a colony of white men among them some 600 years before, and that the Creek language has preserved many Welsh words which have been handed down from generation to generation. According to Mr. Barton, some boat-loads of Welshmen must have been blown across the Atlantic into the Gulf of Mexico, where they entered the Mississippi, went up the Arkansas, and became assimilated with the Indian tribes of New Mexico and Arizona. While all such stories as those just cited must of course be received with the utmost caution, the Welsh really had a naval hero whose fame bid fair for a time to rival that of St. Brendan himself. It is an historic fact that in the year 1170 a dispute arose as to the succession to the throne of Owain, king of Gwynedd, North Wales. One of the princes, Madoc, disgusted with the civil wars, is said to have decided to leave his people and to set sail due west in the ocean. After a while he returned home, and, as a result of the glowing account which he gave of the land he had visited, he had no difficulty in persuading a large number of his countrymen to accompany him on another voyage. This event is referred to in the Welsh Triads<sup>172</sup> (transcribed probably in the twelfth century) which, enumerating the "three complete losses suffered by the Isle of Britain," mention "Madawg ab Owain Gwynedd," who put to sea in ten ships with three hundred men, "ac ni wyddys i bale ydd aethant," "and arrived, no one knows where." It is also narrated by Caradog of Llancarvan in the *History of Cambria*, and by divers other historians.<sup>173</sup> In the margin of the St. Gall manuscript<sup>174</sup> is the following gloss in Old Irish: "Do inis maddoc dún. i. meisse 7 coirbbre," which may mean "we belong to the island of Madoc, I and Cairbre," and refer to an Inis Madoc (Island of Madoc), in the lake of Templeport, County Cavan, Ireland, or to a St. Maddoc, or Mogue, of Ferns, who was born

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<sup>172</sup> Myvyrian Archaeology of Wales, p. 401; J. LOEH, *Les Mabinogion*, 2 ed., ii, pp. 301-302.

<sup>173</sup> HAKLUYT'S *Voyages*, iii (1600), p. 1; *The History of Cambria, now called Wales*, . . . trans. by Humphrey Lloyd, . . . corrected . . . by David Powel, London 1584, pp. 227-229.

<sup>174</sup> Page 194a.

near that lake.<sup>175</sup> Robert Southey made *The Voyage of Madoc* into an epic, now almost forgotten, and Thomas Stephens, the historian of Welsh literature, gathered the material into an exceedingly interesting though imaginative volume entitled, *Madoc, An Essay on the Discovery of America by Madoc*.<sup>176</sup> As late as the year 1792 a zealous Welshman named John Evans undertook a voyage to America to visit the Welsh colony which was believed to have been left here by Madoc. After traveling far and wide, exhausting his funds, being taken for a spy, thrown into prison and suffering many other hardships, he abandoned the quest and died of fever.

But, to return to St. Brendan. There does not seem to be any valid reason for doubting his existence, nor for doubting that he did make the voyage or voyages attributed to him. We shall probably never know positively what real journey is hidden under the accretions which grew in extravagance with each passing generation, or the exact time at which it was performed. Brendan's first sail would appear to be limited to the islands off the west coast of Ireland, perhaps extending to the Orkneys, the Hebrides, or the Faroes; the latter is unquestionably referred to in the description of the Sheep Island. His second voyage indicates a more extended navigation over a vast expanse of ocean in a more southerly direction, beating about from one island to another in the archipelagoes of the eastern Atlantic. In the course of time the accounts of the two voyages became contaminated, and while we find that some of the versions represent Brendan as sailing west, as is rather to be expected, others read "contra solticiū estivale," "encontre midi," or "vers orient," eastward and southward. For the same reason, we find in one and the same text mention of extreme cold and floating structures which may be icebergs, and other phenomena belonging to high latitudes, together with luxuriant herbage and foliage, singing birds and other features characteristic of a temperate or subtropical climate. Consequently it is almost impossible to trace with any confidence on a map the course followed by Brendan. Yet some of the geographic details are curiously accurate, and all the evidence

<sup>175</sup> J. C. ZEUSS, *Grammatica Celtica*, xiii; O'CURRY, *Manuscript Materials*, p. 27. JOYCE, *Social History of Ancient Ireland*, I, p. 489. E. HOGAN, *Onomasticon Gadelicum*.

<sup>176</sup> London and New York, 1894; *Revue Celtique*, xv, 124.

seems to combine to indicate that his first stopping place was most probably the Azores, and then the Madeiras. Curiously enough, one island of the latter group is called *Las Desertas*, and another bears the name *Porto Santo*, which can be traced back at least to the middle of the fourteenth century, if that has any bearing on the question. It is significant also that some of the Madeira Islands formerly bore birds' names; the chart of Gabriel de Valesque, 1439, has drafted an island, apparently in the Azores, called *Ylha de Oesels*. These may be souvenirs of the Bird Islands, which play such a prominent part in the Voyage. Brendan's next haven was in the Canaries, which were also celebrated for their sheep and birds. The Island of Fire has been identified with *Hecla*, but it is much more likely that by it is meant *Teneriffe*, which may have been at that time in eruption. Brendan next seems to have made a considerable sojourn in and near Cape Verde Island, and may even have set foot on Africa near Mount Atlas, where he came to a great river, though this latter excursion is altogether unlikely. Thus far it seems only reasonable to follow him on his voyage. But it is not without the bounds of possibility that on his way home his boat was caught by favorable trade winds and swept into an ocean current. The southern branch of the Gulf Stream passes around Maderia and the Canaries, and its extension is the North Equatorial Current which empties into the sea of the Antilles and the Bahamas. This would carry him necessarily in a great sweep southwest and west to the coast of North or South America.

However gratuitous the attempts which have been made to plot the course of Brendan's voyage, there is no doubt that the spread of the story had a considerable effect on the development of cartography and geographical knowledge. Even though conjecture was given a wide latitude by the early map makers, there seems to have been, for a time at least, a sort of general agreement as to the location of St. Brendan's Islands or, later, Island. Their earliest appearance, thus far recorded, is on the so-called Hereford (England) map which was made by Richard de Haldingham about the year 1275 or 1280, that is, shortly after the discovery of the Canaries.<sup>177</sup> There they are put down with full confidence opposite Mount Atlas, in the location of the

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<sup>177</sup> WESTROPP, p. 240 fl.

Canaries, the identification being, no doubt, due, to some extent at least, to the influence of the ancient geographers who placed the Fortunate Islands in that region. The reading on the Hereford map is "Fortunate Insulae sex sunt Insulae Sct Brandani," "The Fortunate Islands. There are six. The Islands of St. Brendan." The Hereford map was not based on actual discovery, however. The first map drawn along the lines of what may be called serious geography is by Angelinus Dulcert, of Majorca, which dates from 1339. It marks the Islands of St. Brendan distinctly as "Insulle Sa Brandani." The Parmesan map of the Pizzigani Brothers, which dates from 1367,<sup>178</sup> agrees with the Dulcert map in identifying and naming the islands of St. Brendan. It contains not only the legend "Isola Marieniga, isola Canaris, isola Brandani," but also a figure in a monastic garb, intended perhaps to represent St. Brandan himself, bending over the islands as if bestowing a blessing upon them. In general, the maps of the fifteenth century, such as that of the Genoese Battista Beccario, the Weimar map, the maps of the Venetian Graziolo Benincasa, of Fra Mauro and of the Venetian Andrea Bianco, all identified St. Brendan's Island with Madeira, less often with the Canaries. The map of Jacobus de Zireldis (1443), however, places these islands north of Ireland, while the portolano in St. Mark's, Venice, shows an island not far from the west coast of Ireland with the legend "La Montagna de Sto Brandan." Toward the end of the fifteenth century we begin to see the Brendan island moving toward the west and coming nearer to the Equator. At first, the words "St. Brendan's Fortunate Islands" lie between the Madeiras and the Azores and may apply to either group or to both. In Bianco's second great map of 1448, the wandering island is westward of the Azorean archipelago, the largest island of which, corresponding to what is called Terceira today, bears the title "Ya fortunat de sa beati blandan." In the same year as the discovery of America appeared Martin Behem's (Bohemus) celebrated globe, at Nuremberg, on which St. Brendan's Island is placed still farther west and south in midocean, lying between Africa and South America and near the Equator. It seems to be confused with the Antilles and bears the following legend in German: "Nach Christi Gepurt 565 Jar kam Sandbrendan mit

<sup>178</sup> JOMARD, *Les Monuments de la Géographie*.

sein Schiff auf di se Insel, der doselbst vil wonders besah und der über siben Jar darnach wider in sein Landt zog." "In the year 565 after Christ's birth, Saint Brendan, with his ship, came to this Island. He there saw many wonders, and after seven years he came again to his own land." On the map which the Florentine Paolo Toscanelli made for Christopher Columbus and which served as the great discoverer's sailing directions on his first voyage, the island of St. Brendan occupies its customary place southwest of the Canaries and Madeira. In the sixteenth century, as the seas came to be better known, map makers were forced to locate St. Brendan's Island more and more out of the range of navigation. Its general trend was now northward and westward, though the Englishman, Thomas Nicholls, still identified it with Madeira. On the magnificent map painted on parchment, by order of Henry II of England, it is located between Iceland and Newfoundland. About the same position is assigned to it in the so-called Sebastian Cabot map of 1544, which places it in the latitude of the Straits of Belle Isle in the wastes of the North Atlantic. In Ortelius's map (1560), it is brought somewhat nearer to Iceland, west of and in the latitude of Ireland. Similarly in Mercator's map of 1569. In the map by Mathias Quad, of Cologne (1608), it is shown well out to sea between Ireland and North America. Even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries St. Brendan's Island still existed on paper; for example, in a French geographical chart of as late a date as 1755, in which it is placed 5° west of the island of Ferro, in latitude 29° N., and, finally, it took refuge near the Mascarene Islands in the Indian Ocean.

But though St. Brendan's Island constantly shifted position and finally disappeared altogether from geographies, a belief in its existence was confidently clung to during the entire Middle Ages and even after the oceans had been traversed and known in all their parts and the American coast had been discovered from Labrador to Tierra del Fuego. It was supposed to be an isle of supernatural beauty and wonders, and occupied by a saintly Christian people; an echo of this belief is expressed by Camões:

Passadas tenho ja as Canárias ilhas,  
Que tiveram por nome Fortunadas.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> *Os Lusíadas*, Cant. v, estan. viii.



Having left the Canarian Islands far behind—  
Named of yore "The Fortunate."

In his *Imago Mundi*<sup>180</sup> (*Image du Monde*), written in 1130, Honoré d'Autun describes the paradisiacal island which is found only by chance and sought for in vain. He calls it "Quaedam Oceani insula dicta Perdita," and adds, "ad hanc fertur Brandanus venisse":

Une autre ille est que on ne puet  
Veoir comme on aler se veult,  
Et aucune fois est veue:  
Si l'appelle on l'Ille Perdue;  
Celle ille trouva sains Brandains,  
Qui mainte merveille vit ains.

Brendan's Island is also referred to in the *Weltchronik* of Rudolf von Hohen-ems (middle of the thirteenth century), who thus describes it: "Ein îsel heizet Perditâ—das irdensche Paradîs," in which all one's desires are fulfilled:

Der vil wunderlîche gotes degen  
Der abbet sante Brandân  
Kam drin—als ich vernomen hân—  
Ûbr manic hundert jâre sider  
Dâ sich liez ûf die erde nider  
Un Nôê diu grôze diet.<sup>181</sup>

The Abbot, St. Brendan, God's very wonderful knight, came thither—as I have heard—many hundred years ago, when Noah with his numerous folk let himself down on earth.

While engaged in missionary work in Guatemala, Friar Alfonso de Espinosa, a member of the Order of Preachers, heard of the Holy Image of our Lady of Candelaria, in Teneriffe. He afterwards spent many years on that island, and in his book *Del Origen y Milagros de la Santa Imagen de Nuestra Señora de Candelaria*—an interesting work, though of uncertain trustworthiness, published in 1594—he describes how the venerated image had been discovered on the seashore, and quotes a tradition of the few surviving members of the Guanches, or old native population of Teneriffe, to the effect that a party of sixty strangers with a bishop among them had long ago landed in the north of the island, at a place called "The Gathering Place of the Mighty One."

<sup>180</sup> I, 36; *Patrologia Lat.*, c'xxii, p. 133.

<sup>181</sup> *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, xiii, p. 202.

Then, on the strength of a certain "Kalanda," he continues: "Fortunatae insulae sex numero—in Oceano Atlantico ab occasu Africae adjacentes. Hic Blandanus (*sic*) magnae abstinence uir ex Scotia pater trium millium monachorum cum beato Maclonio (*i.e.*, Maclouio) has insulas septennis perlustravit." These things, Espinosa says, were done during the reign of the Emperor Justinian.

Not only did St. Brendan's Island find a place on the maps of Europe and in literary works for at least 400 years, but it was a geographical puzzle which many adventurous souls sought to riddle with almost as much persistence as the passage to the Indies itself. Raoul Glaber declares that people were convinced that it was on St. Brendan's Island that Don Rodrigo, the last Gothic king of Spain, took refuge after his defeat by the Saracens at Jeres de la Frontera (A. D. 711), and that he still, like another Arthur, abides there. At a later period the Spanish believed that it was to that same island that the Portuguese king, Sebastian, retired after his defeat and death at the battle of Alcazar Quivir (1578). When, in 1519, Emmanuel of Portugal signed the Treaty of Evora, he relinquished Portugal's claims to the Canaries and also expressly included in the cession the Island of St. Brendan, which had not yet been discovered. Shortly afterwards, in 1526, two adventurers, Fernando de Troya and Fernando Alvarez, equipped an expedition and set out in search of the mysterious island. Toward the end of that century, in 1589, the Dutch navigator, Van Linschoten, on his return from the Indies, reported that the Canary Islanders firmly believed in the existence of the Isle of San Borondon about one hundred leagues to the right of the Canaries. In the year 1570, inquiries were instituted on Palma and elsewhere in the Canaries, to which pilots and other credible witnesses were summoned. Some of them swore that they had not only seen the mysterious island, but had even set foot on it. Though all agreed as to its general position and outline, some thought it was 100 leagues away, others 50, others only 10. As a result of the inquiry, a flotilla was fitted out and despatched to discover the illusive island. But the difficulty was not to see it but to find it. However clearly it was discerned from a distance, when the sailors came near, a tempest or mist always arose to blot it out and snatch it from their grasp, so that

the saying arose concerning the island, "Quando se busca no se halla," "When it is sought for it is not found." Yet in spite of all these vain efforts, new expeditions continued to go out in search of it. There was one in 1604 under Lorenzo Pinedo and G. Perez de Acosta, and another in 1633. Well might it be said of the Canarians, "superstitiosi enim ultra modum quam dici potest fuerunt populi canarienses."<sup>182</sup> The Jesuit, Don Joseph de Viera y Clavijo, in his very interesting book, *Noticias de la historia general de las islas de Canaria*,<sup>183</sup> in which he examined thoroughly the question of St. Brendan's Island, was forced to admit that there never was a more difficult paradox in the science of geography; since, on the one hand, to affirm its existence was to go counter to all reason, science and criticism; while, on the other, to deny it, was to destroy all faith in tradition and experience, and to suppose that all the trustworthy witnesses who had testified to having seeing it were out of their senses. He left the matter unsettled and concluded by saying that "the impartial reader is at liberty to judge the matter for himself and to take whatever side he pleases, if the matter be one in which there is any certainty to take." Even after the appearance of the learned Jesuit's book, voyages to discover the island continued to be made. In 1721, at the instance of the Governor of the Canaries, a fleet was fitted out on a grand scale and entrusted to Don Gaspar Dominguez, a man of probity and talent. Washington Irving, in his *Life of Columbus*,<sup>184</sup> relying on Nuñez, Viera and other early Spanish authors, describes the excursion as follows: "As this was an expedition of solemn and mysterious import, he (Don Gaspar) had two holy friars as apostolical chaplains. They made sail from the island of Teneriffe, toward the end of October, leaving the populace in an indescribable state of anxious curiosity. The ship, however, returned from its cruise as unsuccessful as all its predecessors." As late as the year 1759, nearly forty persons on one of the Canaries declared that they saw the mysterious island together. By that time people had come to the conclusion that it had a miraculous or diabolic power of appearing and disappearing. It was seen only at intervals, and not only in

<sup>182</sup> *Nova Typis*, etc., (vd. note 113).

<sup>183</sup> Book ii, ch. 28.

<sup>184</sup> Vol. i.

stormy weather but even on the brightest summer days when the atmosphere was most pure and clear. The phenomenal island was, no doubt, an optical illusion, one of those mirages which are common at sea when the image of a real coast is reflected in the clouds; but we are not able to say if it has been seen in our own days.

As early as the twelfth century doubts were expressed and protests raised against the Brendan legend. Giraldus Cambrensis<sup>185</sup> had a fling at it when he wrote "these things might truly be thought incredible except that, in those who believe, all things are possible." In the thirteenth century, the learned Dominican, Vincent de Beauvais (Vincentius Bellovacensis) in his *Speculum Historiale*,<sup>186</sup> was even more severe: "hujus autem peregrinationis historiam," he wrote, "propter apocrypha quaedam deliramenta quae in ea videntur contineri penitus ab opere isto resecamus." Vincent was not consistent, however, for he gave place in his *Mirror* to the story of St. Machutus, which is not less apocryphal than that of St. Brendan. Other writers also considered the whole story fabulous and employed almost the very words as those just quoted regarding it: "vana fictaque vel apocrypha deliramenta, praesertim de septennali ejus navigatione ad insulas prius incognitas," qualifying it as "silly, lying, apocryphal ravings." To judge by the satirical references to St. Brendan which are found in medieval Latin literature, it is not at all unlikely that they are largely the voice of monastic jealousies which grew out of the preposterous claims which Irish monks on the continent were accused of making for their famous countryman. A lively account of their braggadocio was written, between 1281 and 1283, by Nicolai de Bibera Erfordensis. Speaking of the Irish monks in the monastery of St. Jacobus Scotorum in Erfordia (Erfurt), Germany, he says,

Sunt et ibi Scoti, qui cum fuerint bene poti,  
Sanctum Brandanum proclamant esse decanum  
In grege Sanctorum, vel quod deus ipse deorum  
Brandani frater sit et ejus Brigida mater.  
Sed vulgus miserum non credens hoc esse verum  
Estimat insanos Scotos simul atque profanos

<sup>185</sup> *Top. Hib.*, Dist., ii, ch. xlii.

<sup>186</sup> Book xxi, ch. 81.

Talia dicentes. Accedant scire volentes,  
 Ex evangelico textu probo quod tibi dico:  
 Qui non dilinquit, sed qui perfecerit, inquit,  
 Velle mei patris, illum voco nomine fratris.  
 Immo meus frater est et soror et mea mater.  
 Sic sancti quique, qui regnant hic et ubique,  
 Et possunt fratres simul et Christi fore matres,  
 Si non ignores, et possunt esse sorores.  
 Sic Brigidam, Brandanum dicite patrem  
 Nam perfecerunt, quecunque deo placuerunt.

There are some Irishmen there who, when they have drunk too much, proclaim that St. Brendan is the dean of the flock of saints and that the God of gods is the brother of Brendan, and that Brigit is His mother. But the poor people do not believe this to be true: They look on the Irish making such statements as insane and at the same time profane. Let those who desire to know approach: I will prove what I say by a text from the Gospel (here follows a gloss: "quicumque fecerit voluntatem patris mei ipse meus frater, soror, mater," quoting inaccurately from Matt. xii, 50), to wit, "He that sins not, but does the will of my Father, Him I will call brother." Nay, he is my brother, and sister and mother. So, when one thinks of it, the saints, whether they reign here or elsewhere, can be both brother and mother and sister of Christ, like Brigit and Brendan, because they lived according to the will of God.

According to Giraldus Cambrensis,<sup>187</sup> the saints of Ireland were not only exalted by their merits above those of other lands, but, he adds, they appear to have been of a vengeful temper. An instance of this vindictiveness is seen in the following strange story: One day Brendan had commanded a brother to guard a ship which was drawn up on the beach, and, when the tide rose, another brother who was in the ship was in danger of being drowned, and the first brother went to his rescue. Brandan coming up rebuked him and said, "Dost thou love him more than me? Go then and die in his place." Thereupon the brother saved his comrade and was drowned in doing so. The case was tried by the Synod of holy men, who referred it for decision to Brendan's foster mother, Ita, who imposed upon the criminal a sea voyage as a penance, and it was in fulfillment thereof that Brendan went to Britain. In later times St. Brendan came to be regarded as particularly hostile to the Scandinavian invaders, perhaps because he disliked them as rival navigators!

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<sup>187</sup> *Top. Hib.*, Dist., ii, ch. lv.

In *Three Fragments of Irish Annals*, it is chronicled under 863 A. D., that Earl Tomar, a fierce, rough, cruel man of the Norsemen, came from Limerick to Clúain-fearta-Brenainn (Brendan's favorite establishment at Clonfert), expecting to find great prey in that church, but word of his coming had gone out a short time before him. Some of the monks whom he found on the floor of the church and in the churchyard he put to death. But in that same year Tomar died of madness, and at his last moments he saw in a vision Brendan killing him.

The bitterest attack that ever was launched on the Brendan legend was made by an unknown poet, in a metrical life of St. Brendan in Latin, preserved in an eleventh or twelfth century manuscript at Lincoln College, Oxford.<sup>188</sup> It begins:

Hic poeta, qui Brendani uitam uult describere,  
Graue crimen uiro Dei uidetur inurere.

This poet who would fain write the life of Brendan, seems to attach a serious crime to the man of God.

The author exclaims against the folly of believing that St. Brendan forsook the 3,000 monks who were intrusted to his care and for whose guidance he would have to render an account to God, and that,

Currens semper ad occasum uelo, uento, remige,  
Coursing ever towards the west, under sail, with the wind, and by oar,  
he sought in the sea what is to be found only in heaven.

O rem miram, risu dignam, et plenam stulticie!  
Fabulosum est, non uerum, neque ueri simile.

Oh, how strange, laughable, and full of folly—A fable it is, not true nor even truthlike.

He objects to the demons singing praises to the Creator which, he holds, is contrary to Catholic doctrine. Then with a burst of indignation he exclaims:

O quam macra et infelix spes est Hibernensium,  
Quibus post hanc vitam tota merces operum  
Terra nuda et lapilli atque flores arborum!

How lean and miserable is the hope of the Irish, whose only reward for their labors after this life is a bare land, with stones and the flowers of trees.

<sup>188</sup> PLUMMER, *o. c.*, ii, 293-294.

On the other hand, very high praise is bestowed upon Brendan, and the reading of his *Voyage* is warmly commended, in another Latin poem which consists chiefly of a translation of the well-known Anglo-Norman version. It contains 311 rhymed quatrains in catalectic tetrameter, and was written, it would appear, for a certain Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln.<sup>189</sup> It begins:

Vana vanis garriat	pagina pagana,
Greges agros prelia	vox Virgiliana,
Mundi dilectoribus	placeant mundana;
Alexandri studia	pia sint, non vana.

To the vain, the pagan page chatters its emptiness; the voice of Virgil sings of flocks and farms and wars. Let those who find pleasure in this world, delight in worldly things. But let Alexander's reading be of holy, not of empty, subjects.

The poem contains some eloquent passages, as the description of the whale and the account of the meeting with Judas, who, enjoying a short respite due to Brendan's intercession, exclaims "Horror hic pro requie mihi reputatur." The author borrows lavishly from classical mythology and delights in verbal conceits, for example, in this description of Brendan's monastic regime:

Abbas jam de monacho,	mater fit in patre.
Patris ei gravitas,	amor dignus matre.
Patrem matre temperans	imperabat grate.
Sic qui fratres regitis	patres imperate!

These two Latin poems may be taken as representing the two extreme views which have been held and are still held concerning the Brendan legend. It remains to say a word about the influence which the legend exercised over two great Italians. For the first of these it will be sufficient to quote the words of the foremost living American Dantean scholar: "Among the numerous medieval accounts of the terrestrial paradise which Dante may have used in the composition of his *Purgatorio*, there is one with which he seems to have been particularly familiar. Between the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* and the *Commedia* there are resemblances so clear as almost to exclude the possibility of chance coincidence or indirect influence."<sup>190</sup> Now it is important

<sup>189</sup> ERNST MARTIN, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum u. d. Litt.*, Vol. xvi, Neue Folge, iv, 1873, p. 289 ff; MORAN, *Acta S. Brendani*, pp. 43-84.

<sup>190</sup> C. H. GRANDGENT, *Cato and Elijah*, Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, xvii, 1902, pp. 82-83.

to remember that it was from Dante that Christopher Columbus may have got the first idea of his voyage to the Indies. He must also have been acquainted with the writings of his townsman, Jacobus de Voragine (obit. 1298) who was Bishop of Genoa and who in his *Golden Legend* gave special prominence to the Promised Land of St. Brendan. For at least two centuries Brendan's name and expedition were very popular in Genoa, a maritime city, and we can easily believe that Columbus, who was blind to everything but his great mission and studied with avidity all the theories, stories and conjectures that were current in his day, in fact every shred of information that pertained to the sea and especially to the Atlantic, could not fail to be familiar with the legend of St. Brendan. When he came to live in Portugal and married into a sea-going family, the chief topic of discussion was naturally voyages and discoveries, and among these the voyage of St. Brendan held the place of prominence. His son Fernando writes of his father, "gli piaceva molto ragionare con coloro che per quanta navigavano,"<sup>191</sup> and, speaking of the inducements which led him to undertake the voyage, Fernando mentions "las (sc. islas) de San Brendan, de que se cuentan cosas admirables,"<sup>192</sup> "the islands of St. Brendan, of which wonderful things are told." Thus the legend must have had a decided influence on the mind of Columbus, and helped to lighten the terrors of the unknown ocean. Under date of Jueves 9 de Agosto 1492, when on board ship on his first voyage of discovery, he wrote that, when he was in Portugal, in 1484, he had seen men who had come from Madeira to ask for a caravel to go in search of the land that continued to appear every year.<sup>193</sup> "I am convinced," he wrote, "that therein (namely, the Island of St. Brendan) must be the earthly paradise to which no one can come except by the will of God." Could it be that it was due to the influence of Brendan that Columbus took with him in the *Santa Maria* at least one Irish sailor, "Gulliermo Ires natural de Galuy en Irlanda?" It is worthy of mention that this William the Irishman was a native of Galway, Ireland's most flourishing

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<sup>191</sup> Ch. V.

<sup>192</sup> *Historia del Almirante Don Cristobal Colon*, por Fernando Colon, su hijo, Madrid, 1892, i, 44.

<sup>193</sup> NAVARRETE, *Coleccion de los viajes y descubrimientos*, tom. i, Madrid, 1835.



seaport facing the Atlantic, and it is not too much to suppose that he was chosen as especially familiar with all Irish sea-lore and especially with the legend of the Voyage of St. Brendan. At the very least, then, one may say that, even if Saint Brendan was not the discoverer himself, which has not been proved, his story was one of the moving causes that led Columbus to the discovery of the New World.

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